



## BLUE MOUNTAIN RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION

### To the Community Policing Committee:

### Effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Watch Program is Seriously Jeopardized by the STA Issue

The London Program provides us with the statistics showing that 'crimes of opportunity' – break-ins, vandalism, and rowdiness are greatly reduced when Neighbourhood Watch and similar programs are in place.

#### What is the Problem?

There is an ongoing challenge with vandalism and rowdy behaviour in the Craighleith resort area as well as areas surrounding the Village at Blue. The Neighbourhood Watch program has now been running for 10 months and we haven't seen the improvement we hoped. There is a major factor for this limited improvement and it is tied directly to the problem of Short Term Accommodations (STA). These rentals present a more difficult and unique challenge for the Watch program.

1. Residents have been confused as to what action they should take. There is confusion over what they should report and to whom. Many of these residents wish to remain anonymous due to fear.
2. Many residents fear and some cases have experienced retaliation for reporting incidents to police. We are aware of at least one person who has received a terse and somewhat threatening response to his direct appeal to a Property Management Company regarding a complaint. Other residents have put up with name calling and taunts by partiers after the police have left. Many wake up to find minor damage or property theft which they associate with retaliation.
3. There is a constant fear of physical harm or property damage if residents try to confront the perpetrators directly (re: calls to lowering the noise or getting off of their property.)
4. There is a high level of frustration and feeling of hopelessness that nothing will change;
  - a. No one is listening
  - b. Residents are considered "whiners", especially when they complain about petty theft, mischief (i.e. knocking down or stealing bird houses, BBQ covers, lawn ornaments, Christmas decorations, etc) and
  - c. Trespassers leave dog feces', garbage & broken beer bottles as they take shortcuts through private properties, trampled gardens, etc.

The Neighbourhood Watch program is geared to dealing with the usual known trouble makers causing problems in a community. The residents in this area, primarily due to STA's, have the added burden of dealing with a new group of transient visitors every week/weekend. This situation is magnified on long weekends which make this area a disaster!

We welcome tourists to the area but the high occupancy levels permitted in single family zones and the unregulated nature of the STA's operating in these residential locations is seriously jeopardizing and compromising the effectiveness of our program, the safety of the residents and safe policing.

These so-called tourists are not strangers to the neighbourhood in the usual sense – they are “paying strangers” that come with a sense of entitlement and a group or, once alcohol is added, some would say a “gang” mentality. The resident's first instinct is **NOT** to call the police. They do not want trouble nor do they want to use up good will with the police. These full time residents hope that each incident is an isolated one and will not escalate. The first instinct of most residents is to show some common courtesy as one would with a full time neighbour by going over to talk to the persons/people causing the problem. Sometimes this means “shouting” over the fence depending on how long and how late the noise continues. However, where STA's are concerned, there are too many examples where this approach has not worked and has lead to serious confrontations, threats and/or retaliation.

### **What are the immediate actions/solutions required?**

1. Residents need to clearly understand to whom they report incidents.
2. Residents need to feel confident that the police will deal anonymously with each complaint.
3. Police have to reassure residents that they want to hear about their complaints – in other words, that it's OK to call and to not approach strangers directly.
4. We need to revise and strengthen the messages in the Neighbourhood Watch pamphlet.
5. We need to provide easy contact materials such as fridge magnets, telephone stickers for use by all residents outlining who to phone and the telephone number: For example:
  - OPP for noise, theft & property damage, parking problems, transients with open liquor, suspected drunk driving, drug use, etc.
  - By-law Officer for damage to street signs or public property, garbage problems, etc. (Police when By-Law Officer is not available/on duty) and
6. Most importantly, we need to support the Town at the OMB to ensure Regulation and Control of STAs.

In my opinion the Neighbourhood Watch Program will not be successful nor will it be adopted in areas where these “petty crime infested neighbourhoods” are allowed to exist. In fact, we may see a more negative attitude towards the program due to these issues. Left unchecked this petty crime will continue to grow into more serious issues and will start spreading into other areas of the Town, especially along the waterfront. Finally and most importantly, this petty crime from unregulated STA's will certainly not contribute to the sustainability of healthy residential neighborhoods, which is the #1 reason for the Town supporting and backing the program in the first place.

Michael P. Seguin  
President  
Blue Mountain Ratepayers Association



## **BLUE MOUNTAIN RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION**

### **Agenda of Meeting:**

1. Review problem and discuss possible solutions.
2. How can the Community Policing Committee assist to ensure the success of the Neighbourhood Watch Program in Craikleith resort area, and one that is spreading along the Georgian Bay waterfront and throughout the Town of the Blue Mountains.