Boundary Adjustment between Springwater and Barrie – Developments to Date and Stakeholder Power Map

Background and Context

In September 2023, the City of Barrie's Mayor first proposed a major boundary adjustment: annexing portions of Springwater Township to accommodate Barrie's future growth. A four-party Joint Land Needs Study (Barrie, Springwater, Simcoe County, and Oro-Medonte) was commissioned in 2024, confirming that Barrie and Springwater share a regional market area and that Springwater's planned growth (e.g. in the Midhurst area) might soon require additional employment lands. In essence, Barrie needed land for expansion (especially for jobs) and was unwilling to extend municipal services into Springwater without a boundary change. In fact, Barrie's Council passed a motion in December 2024 refusing to provide water/wastewater services to neighboring townships unless annexation occurred. Springwater's initial response was cautious: Council signaled it would engage in discussions, but also explored options to retain key lands. In February 2025, Councillor Moore introduced a motion (which Council supported) to examine expanding Springwater's own settlement boundaries (e.g. the Midhurst Secondary Plan area toward Highway 400) – effectively a strategy to accommodate growth internally rather than cede territory to Barrie. The Midhurst Landowners Group (MLG) – a consortium of developers with major projects in Springwater – backed this approach, offering to supply studies demonstrating how Springwater could service an expanded area itself. This set the stage for a complex tug-of-war: Barrie pushing for annexation as a condition for servicing, and Springwater's majority on Council looking for ways to fulfill growth needs without giving up land. Simcoe County also favored a "regional systems" approach to growth (coordinating infrastructure without necessarily redrawing boundaries) and remained supportive of the lower-tier municipalities' efforts. Through early 2025, Springwater Council participated in the Province's facilitated negotiation process with Barrie, even as internal skepticism grew. Several closed sessions were held to review strategy and legal implications. By April 2025, Council had authorized continuing with the Provincial Facilitator's process (under agreed terms of reference) and invited legal advisors to weigh in. This led to Springwater retaining Loopstra Nixon LLP for legal counsel on the boundary matter. Concurrently, Springwater staff and consultants studied the fiscal and infrastructure impacts of a potential adjustment (e.g. a Watson & Associates fiscal impact presentation was prepared by mid-April). A significant turning point came on May 1, 2025, when the Province of Ontario granted "Strong Mayor" powers to Springwater's Mayor, Jennifer Coughlin. These new powers (extended by the province to select municipalities to advance

provincial housing priorities) allow a mayor to propose certain by-laws aligned with provincial goals and pass them with only one-third support of council, and also to veto council by-laws that conflict with prescribed provincial priorities. Empowered by this tool, Mayor Coughlin moved swiftly. On May 7, 2025, she tabled a strong-mayor by-law authorizing herself (and staff) to engage directly in negotiations with Barrie and the Province to “expedite an economical, mutually satisfactory outcome,” explicitly stating that this by-law would override any previous Council resolutions on the boundary talks. The by-law passed with only the minimal required support (one-third of Council), reflecting a deeply split Council. In practice, this shifted negotiating authority to the Mayor’s office. Two days later, May 9, Mayor Coughlin and Barrie Mayor Alex Nuttall issued a joint “Shared Principles for Boundary Adjustment” – an initial agreement in principle between the two mayors on how to proceed. The Mayor further directed Springwater staff (via Mayoral Direction MDIR-2025-001 on May 15) to do everything needed to facilitate talks with Barrie and the Province. At this stage, the Mayor was effectively leading the charge for a deal, backed by the Province’s special authority, while a majority of Springwater councillors remained wary. Tensions escalated in a dramatic May 21, 2025 Council meeting. Barrie’s Mayor Nuttall personally presented the proposed boundary adjustment framework to Springwater Council in open session, emphasizing the benefits of the deal. Springwater’s Council, however, refused to even formally receive his presentation (a sign of distrust or opposition). Instead, Council immediately passed a motion directing staff to seek independent legal advice on the Barrie proposal – tasking Loopstra Nixon LLP with reviewing all relevant documents (resolutions, studies, proposals) and providing an opinion. This move by Council established an adversarial tone: the Mayor was negotiating a deal, while Council wanted an outside legal critique of that very deal. It also formally engaged Loopstra Nixon, under Council’s authority, as the Township’s legal counsel for this issue. Throughout mid-2025, as negotiations continued under provincial facilitation, Springwater’s Council majority took steps to bolster the Township’s position (and perhaps counter the Mayor’s unilateral approach). On June 4, 2025, consultants WSP presented growth management findings, and correspondence from the MLG reiterated support for expanding Springwater’s development footprint (rather than handing lands to Barrie). Later, at a July 2, 2025 meeting, Council demonstrated its resolve to retain control over development in key areas. Citing a recent update on growth projections and developer input, Council revoked its earlier support for two Minister’s Zoning Orders (MZOs) that had been requested by developers (Remington Group and Paul Sadlon Communities) for projects on the Barrie-Springwater border. These MZOs, granted in 2023, allowed fast-tracked development on lands along Bayfield Street at Springwater’s southern edge. Initially, Springwater had supported them, but crucially, servicing for those projects was left “to be determined”. Now, Council was insisting that those developments be serviced by Springwater’s own infrastructure (the Midhurst

water/wastewater system) as a condition of its support, explicitly rejecting any plan to have Barrie service them. This was a strategic stance: the Bayfield Street corridor lands were among the areas Barrie might want, and by forcing them onto Springwater services, Council aimed to strengthen Springwater's hand (or at least prevent a scenario where Barrie extends services into Springwater without annexation). Council's motion to this effect was circulated to Ontario's Municipal Affairs Minister (Rob Flack), the developers, MLG, and the provincial facilitator – signaling Springwater's position to all stakeholders. The Mayor did not veto this July 2 Council decision, but it set up a conflict with her later approach. Meanwhile, Loopstra Nixon delivered its legal opinion on the boundary proposal in late July: at a July 29, 2025 closed session, Council received Loopstra's advice and voted to share it confidentially with Simcoe County and Oro-Medonte, and to prepare a public-facing summary. This indicates that Springwater's Council was working in concert with these other municipal stakeholders, likely to build a united front. By mid-August, Provincial Facilitator Dan Mathieson (who had taken over from an earlier facilitator, Jeff Schelling) provided updates but no breakthrough – the August 14 facilitated session yielded no new direction or agreement. September 2025 saw the conflict reach new heights. In a Sept 3, 2025 closed session, Council posed detailed questions to Loopstra and another legal firm (WeirFoulds) about the situation – including the legality of using strong-mayor powers in this context and specifics about servicing the contested lands. Upon returning to open session, Council decided to publish Loopstra's legal opinion for transparency. That same evening, Mayor Coughlin made a bold attempt to reverse one of Council's key decisions. Citing the need to keep negotiations on track, she proposed to reconsider Council's July 2 "no cross-border servicing" motion. Council flatly voted that down. In response, Mayor Coughlin immediately exercised her strong-mayor authority again: she introduced a new by-law (strong-mayor) to permit cross-border servicing for the Bayfield Street corridor and explicitly revoke Council's July 2 resolution that had blocked such servicing. This by-law, giving the Mayor latitude to discuss servicing those lands with Barrie/province, passed with only one-third of Council supporting it (again highlighting the deep division). Essentially, the Mayor was willing to undo Council's conditions to keep Barrie's framework agreement viable, since Barrie's deal likely contemplated servicing those border developments via Barrie utilities. This action further alienated the majority of Council and edged the municipality closer to a governance crisis. Also on Sept 3, immediately after the Mayor's by-law, Deputy Mayor Cabral introduced a motion calling for an *internal investigation into the origins of the boundary adjustment mapping* that had been used in discussions. Council, feeling sidelined by how the annexation map was drawn, unanimously backed this probe. The preamble of Cabral's motion revealed why trust had entirely broken down: It recounted how in early 2023, before any strong-mayor powers existed, Mayor Coughlin (Springwater) and Mayor Nuttall (Barrie) had begun private discussions about a boundary deal, even involving Oro-Medonte's

officials in some meetings, all without Springwater Council's knowledge or authorization. These talks produced a draft map outlining which Springwater (and Oro-Medonte) lands would go to Barrie. Council only learned of this mapping much later (seeing it in a December 2024 Hemson report), and worse, at a Barrie Council meeting it was suggested that Springwater's side had *offered up* additional parcels beyond what Barrie initially asked for – notably the Bayfield Street/Highway 26 corridor lands and others that Barrie itself hadn't specifically requested. Springwater's councillors were alarmed at the implication that someone (presumably within Springwater's administration or leadership) volunteered these extra lands for annexation without Council's consent. In short, Council suspected that the Mayor or her allies had gone rogue early on, negotiating away pieces of Springwater. Cabral's Sept 3 motion demanded answers: who created those maps, who authorized including those extra parcels, and how did this all occur under Council's radar. The investigation was to use the Township's IT resources to scour for any documents or metadata about the maps, with a report due by Oct 15. This reveals a critical backdrop to the dispute: issues of trust and legitimacy. Council felt the Mayor had pre-empted their authority well before receiving special powers, and that she might be advancing interests not sanctioned by the elected Council (possibly aligned with certain developers or provincial expectations). The Mayor, meanwhile, likely viewed Council as parochial or obstructive to a deal that she believed was in the Township's long-term interest. These opposing narratives were hardening. By October 2025, the facilitation process was nearing its formal end. Barrie's Council had approved a draft boundary adjustment framework agreement (the deal negotiated by the two mayors and the facilitator) and public consultations were being wrapped up. Springwater Council, armed with multiple legal opinions, was preparing to take a definitive stand. On Oct 8, 2025, Springwater held a special meeting to consider a legal letter from the firm Davies Howe (which outlined limits on using strong-mayor powers for this boundary matter). In reaction, Council requested further legal opinions from both Loopstra Nixon and Aird & Berlis (John Mascarin's firm) to ensure they understood the legal boundaries of the Mayor's powers. These opinions were delivered in a closed session on Oct 15, 2025 and were promptly made public by Council. The advice likely reinforced Council's view that the Mayor's unilateral actions could be invalid or challengeable. That same Oct 15 meeting was originally slated for Council to vote on the Barrie-Springwater framework agreement (deferred from September), but Council postponed the final decision, preferring to wait and see Barrie's formal proposal and the County's stance. Simcoe County's Council weighed in on Nov 4, 2025, passing its own resolution about the boundary: the County supported only a much smaller annexation (three specific parcels labeled S1, S2, S3) rather than the broader land transfer Barrie wanted. This County intervention gave Springwater's Council additional cover to resist – it showed a regional consensus for a scaled-down adjustment if any. November 5, 2025: The Showdown. Springwater's regular Council meeting on Nov 5 was the climactic turning point. The

Barrie boundary agreement – in the form of a detailed framework/offer – was finally before the Council (as a deferred report from Oct 15). With the facilitator's clock running out, Springwater's Council had to either accept or reject the deal (or suggest modifications). Tensions were extraordinarily high after the months of conflict. During the meeting, Councillor Moore moved a motion (without prior notice) that attempted a compromise position: Springwater would ask the Minister of Municipal Affairs to adjust the proposed annexation map and terms – specifically, to shrink the annexation to only the parcels S1, S2, S3 (as per Simcoe County's recommendation) and to remove any cross-border servicing provision from the agreement. In essence, Moore's motion said Springwater could support a very limited land transfer (and only if those lands were immediately needed for housing) but not the inclusion of the contentious Bayfield Street corridor employment lands or any scheme where Springwater's own growth area would be serviced by Barrie. This motion passed with Council's majority support. It signaled that Council was willing to cooperate with the province's housing goals ("yes" to a minor boundary tweak) but on Springwater's terms, not Barrie's sweeping proposal. After approving Moore's motion, Council proceeded to vote on the main question of the Barrie-Springwater agreement as presented. Predictably, the Council formally rejected the proposed framework agreement with Barrie, instructing the Township to inform Minister Flack of this decision. This was Resolution C444-2025, and it aligned with the position that Springwater would not voluntarily accept Barrie's full annexation proposal. However, Mayor Coughlin was not prepared to let the deal (and months of negotiation) die. Immediately following Council's rejection, she invoked her strong-mayor powers to override the Council's decision. The Mayor introduced a new by-law (2025-093) to authorize the execution of the Barrie-Springwater boundary adjustment agreement exactly as negotiated. Notably, she included a clause in this by-law declaring that "*Notwithstanding any previous resolutions of Council regarding the Barrie Boundary discussions, this by-law shall take precedence*". This meant her by-law, if passed, would nullify the effect of Council's rejection (C444) and even Moore's earlier motion (C443). With only a minority of councillors supporting her, the Mayor's by-law carried with one-third of Council in favor – just enough under the Strong Mayor legislation. In practical terms, Mayor Coughlin unilaterally enacted the boundary agreement on behalf of Springwater. By the meeting's end on Nov 5, there were two irreconcilable "directions" on record: the majority of Council's resolutions opposing or modifying the deal, and the Mayor's singular by-law approving it. The Mayor's view was that her by-law had legal primacy (due to the override clause and the Strong Mayor authority), thereby making the agreement the Township's official position. Council's view was that their democratic decision stood and the Mayor's move was illegitimate. This governance crisis set off an immediate legal battle. Late that night (Nov 5), Councillor Fisher introduced a further motion (C446-2025) authorizing aggressive legal action to challenge the Mayor's impugned by-law. Council, having waived procedural rules to

allow this urgent motion, passed it. The resolution directed Loopstra Nixon LLP to take any and all necessary legal steps – for example, an application to the courts to quash the Mayor's by-law as illegal, and to seek an injunction preventing anyone from acting on that by-law in the meantime. In short, Council moved to sue its own Mayor/Township to stop the agreement, arguing her action was ultra vires (beyond her authority). Springwater had thus authorized litigation to be launched against the validity of the strong-mayor by-law. In the days that followed, Mayor Coughlin used every tool at her disposal to counter Council's revolt. On November 7, 2025, she issued Mayoral Decision MD-2025-005, vetoing Council's confirmatory by-law from the Nov 5 meeting (By-law 2025-091) specifically to nullify Council's Resolution C446-2025. (Under Ontario's strong mayor laws, a mayor can veto council by-laws that conflict with provincial priorities; here she argued that Council's attempt to initiate legal proceedings might impede a provincially-prioritized housing deal, thus she vetoed the by-law that would formalize that resolution.) The very next day, Nov 8, Mayor Coughlin took another unprecedented step: via Mayoral Direction MDIR-2025-005, she ordered Township staff to terminate the engagement of Loopstra Nixon LLP (effective immediately, retroactive to Nov 7) and to cease payment for any of Loopstra's work going forward. In other words, the Mayor unilaterally "fired" Council's chosen legal counsel. Her directive instructed that Loopstra be notified that they were no longer acting for Springwater. The Mayor was effectively attempting to cut off Council's ability to pursue the legal challenge by removing the lawyers working on it. However, it was highly questionable whether she had the authority to do this – Loopstra's retainer had been approved by Council resolution, and normally a mayor (even with strong powers) cannot hire or fire external counsel at will if that power rests with Council. This set the stage for a direct power struggle not only between Mayor and Council, but also between two sets of lawyers. Alarmed by these actions, a majority of Springwater Councillors petitioned for an emergency special meeting on November 10, 2025. That evening, Council convened (despite the Mayor's likely objections) to address the "Use of Strong Mayor Powers relating to the Barrie Boundary Adjustment, including Dismissal of Loopstra Nixon LLP and superseding of Council direction". It was essentially a crisis meeting to decide how to respond to the Mayor's veto and her firing of their lawyers. The meeting was chaotic: Councillor Fisher introduced a motion to retain legal counsel and commence litigation specifically regarding the Mayor's misuse of Strong Mayor powers. Mayor Coughlin immediately ruled Fisher's motion out of order, attempting to block it. In response, Council voted to suspend the procedural rules and re-introduce the motion anyway. The motion (recorded as C452-2025) passed with Council's majority. In its preamble, it cited the Mayor's key actions on May 7 and Sept 3 (the strong-mayor by-laws facilitating the Barrie deal) and reaffirmed that Council had retained Loopstra on May 21. Although the full text of C452 isn't given here, it effectively authorized whatever legal steps were necessary to rein in the Mayor's overreach – likely including court applications for

judicial review or clarification of powers. Notably, Council may also have been preparing for a judicial inquiry into the governance fiasco (they referenced a “judicial inquiry” as a potential avenue). In passing C452, Council signaled that despite the Mayor’s attempt to fire Loopstra, they still intended to pursue legal action – presumably by either continuing with Loopstra (if they ignored the Mayor’s firing as invalid) or hiring alternate counsel. Mayor Coughlin, however, vetoed Council’s November 10 actions as well. On Nov 12, 2025, she issued Mayoral Decision MD-2025-006, vetoing the confirmatory by-law of the Nov 10 meeting (By-law 2025-095) to strike down Resolution C452-2025 in the same fashion as before. This spiraling conflict came to a head at a regular meeting on Nov 12, 2025 (initially scheduled to discuss the 2026 budget). With two vetos now issued, Council took the opportunity to formally reassert its position through new resolutions. Councillor Alexander moved a motion (C458-2025) essentially declaring Council’s “official position” going forward. In this resolution, Springwater Council stated, point-blank, that it opposed the Barrie boundary framework agreement (as passed by the Mayor) and instead *stood by the modified “Moore motion” position from Nov 5*. It also confirmed that Springwater would proceed with all necessary court actions to overturn the Mayor’s strong-mayor by-laws and would pursue the judicial inquiry into the matter. Importantly, Council declared that Loopstra Nixon “continues to be” the Township’s legal counsel in spite of the Mayor’s directives, and that both the provincial facilitator and Ontario’s Municipal Affairs Ministry should be advised of Council’s stance. In a further motion (C459-2025) that day, Councillor Garwood and others addressed the core governance dilemma by posing a series of specific questions to be answered – either by a judicial inquiry or through the courts – about who actually holds valid authority in this situation. These questions included: Was the Mayor’s veto of Council’s Nov 5 resolution valid given that the resolution was not a by-law? Was the Mayor’s attempt to fire Council’s lawyer lawful? Could the Mayor shield her actions from review by Council or courts? And fundamentally, *who* can legally act for the Township when Mayor and Council are at odds on a “matter fundamental to the Township”? In the same motion, Council explicitly nullified the Mayor’s actions in its view: it resolved that the Mayor’s strong-mayor by-laws did not carry out prescribed provincial priorities (since they involved significant employment land issues beyond just housing) and therefore “are of no effect”. Council also declared the Mayor’s vetoes and directions invalid because the Mayor cannot veto mere resolutions (only by-laws), nor can she remove Council-appointed counsel – those acts were *ultra vires* her powers. Furthermore, Council reaffirmed Loopstra’s retention (even “reappointing” them to be certain) and ordered that all prior Council directions be carried out regardless of any Mayor’s orders to the contrary. Essentially, the Council was creating a formal record that the Mayor’s moves were illegitimate under the Municipal Act and that Council remained the directing mind of the municipality. Of course, from the Mayor’s perspective, her actions were authorized by provincial law aimed at advancing provincial priorities (in this case,

facilitating housing development via the Barrie boundary deal). This fundamental impasse left Springwater's governance in disarray and likely headed to court intervention.

Provincial Intervention and Latest Developments (late Nov 2025)

By mid-November 2025, it was clear that local resolution was impossible and the Province of Ontario would step in. All eyes turned to Municipal Affairs Minister Rob Flack. The Province had a strong interest in a timely outcome – Ontario's priority was to increase housing supply, and protracted municipal infighting was untenable. The provincial facilitator, Dan Mathieson, formally concluded the Springwater-Barrie facilitation process around November 18. Mathieson informed Springwater's officials (calling each councillor individually) that the facilitated negotiations were over and the file was being handed to the Minister for a decision

He even indicated that provincial legislation or an Order-in-Council to enact the boundary change was imminent – perhaps as soon as the next day (or within days)

In other words, the Province was poised to unilaterally impose a boundary adjustment. Mayor Coughlin learned that the Minister's decision (likely a special law or regulation) could come any day. Given this context, the Mayor and her advisors pivoted their strategy to focus on the Province. They recognized that if the Province proceeds, it could simply transfer the lands to Barrie without upholding the carefully negotiated conditions of the Springwater-Barrie agreement. Indeed, the Province had signaled it would not legislate the servicing and compensation elements of the deal – those would normally be left for the municipalities to sort out via agreement

This was the nightmare scenario for Springwater: Barrie might get the land by law, while the promised benefits to Springwater (over $22 million in compensation, guaranteed infrastructure connections, etc.) could be lost or unenforceable

Thus, Mayor Coughlin's priority became securing Springwater's "seat at the table" in the provincial decision so that the Township's interests would be protected despite Council's opposition and the Province's likely intervention. Around November 17, 2025, anticipating the province's move, the Mayor (through the Township's alternate legal counsel) formally engaged Gestalt Communications to assist with strategic communications and public affairs. A letter of agreement was signed between Affleck Greene McMurtry LLP (AGM, the Mayor's lawyers) and Gestalt on Nov 17–18, outlining a three-month intensive communications mandate. Gestalt's role was to help navigate the crisis on the public and political fronts, ensuring Springwater (under Mayor Coughlin) could still influence outcomes and public perception. By Nov 19, 2025, the Mayor's team – including legal counsel William McLennan from AGM and consultants from Gestalt – held strategy calls to coordinate next steps. Their approach had two prongs: government relations and media narrative. First, they planned to reach out

directly to Minister Flack or his key staff immediately, aiming to get a read on what the provincial decision would entail and to advocate for inclusion of Springwater's negotiated terms (servicing, compensation) in whatever measure was coming

The Mayor had a direct line to the facilitator, but now she sought a direct line to the Minister. Gestalt's team agreed to leverage their contacts in the Minister's Office to facilitate a conversation or meeting on very short notice

Second, they prepared for communications once the Province acted. It was suggested that Springwater and Barrie issue a joint public statement as soon as the Province announced the boundary decision – a statement that would **"gloss over" the internecine dispute and emphasize moving forward cooperatively for the community's benefit

The rationale was to project stability and unity to residents and stakeholders, reassuring them that the outcome was positive and that both municipalities were on the same page. Mayor Coughlin agreed to reach out to Barrie's Mayor Nuttall to line up a coordinated response

The messaging would likely highlight that the boundary adjustment was aligned with "advancing provincial priorities" (especially housing) – turning the narrative toward the future and away from the political strife

Internally, the Mayor's communications strategy (developed by Gestalt) was built on reframing the narrative: shifting focus away from the strong-mayor process controversy and back to the substantive benefits of the deal for Springwater (e.g. new infrastructure, growth management, financial compensation)

At the same time, they aimed to expose the opposition's motives and conflicts: noting that the councillors fighting the deal were allied with certain developers and law firms protecting private interests over the public interest

This would set the stage for repairing the Mayor's public image by portraying her as acting in Springwater's long-term interest, in contrast to a council bloc influenced by other agendas. As of the date of this report (late November 2025), the Province's final decision is pending. Springwater's Mayor and Council have essentially reached a stalemate that only provincial legislation (or a court ruling) can resolve. It is expected that the Ontario government will announce a boundary adjustment solution imminently, likely granting Barrie certain lands. The exact scope (whether the full original proposal or a trimmed version) and the handling of conditions (servicing and compensation) remain to be seen. Both Springwater factions await this outcome: for Mayor Coughlin, a hope that the Province will endorse the deal she signed (ideally including its safeguards

for Springwater), and for Council, perhaps a hope that the Province might limit the annexation in line with community input or at least vindicate their concerns. In either case, the focus will shift to implementing the Province's decision and managing the fallout – repairing relationships, ensuring promised benefits are delivered, and addressing any ongoing legal questions about governance. The groundwork laid in the communications strategy suggests the Mayor's team will strive to present the provincial intervention as a positive, community-building outcome, emphasizing that Springwater will continue to have a voice in the process. The political reality, however, is that this saga has revealed deep fractures in Springwater's local governance and has involved players at every level of government.

Power Map of Key Stakeholders and Participants

The boundary adjustment conflict has involved a wide array of stakeholders, both formal (governmental actors) and informal (interested groups and individuals). Below is a "power map" of the key participants, outlining their roles, influence, motivations, and relationships:

- Mayor Jennifer Coughlin (Township of Springwater) – *Role:* Springwater's Mayor and the central proponent of the Barrie boundary deal. Armed with new "strong mayor" powers, she took unilateral steps to advance what she viewed as a beneficial agreement for her township. *Influence:* High executive authority (enabled by provincial legislation) – she could introduce and pass certain by-laws with minimal Council support and veto Council decisions in limited cases. However, her influence over public opinion and full Council was limited (she faced significant backlash). *Motivations:* To secure a comprehensive deal with Barrie that would bring Springwater new water/wastewater infrastructure and an estimated $22 million compensation package, while meeting provincial growth directives
- She appears genuinely convinced that the boundary adjustment, with proper conditions, is in Springwater's long-term interest (ensuring serviced land and funds for the township's future development). Also, as Mayor, she has a stake in maintaining credibility with the Province (by being seen as a willing partner in housing growth) and avoiding a scenario where Springwater loses land without benefits. *Affiliations and Relationships:* Mayor Coughlin is closely allied with Barrie's Mayor (Nuttall) and the provincial government on this issue – she coordinated with Mayor Nuttall to craft a framework and jointly presented a united front via "Shared Principles". She has cultivated direct lines to provincial actors (the facilitator, Minister's office) and is now supported by AGM Lawyers and Gestalt Communications (whom she engaged to support her office's legal and PR strategy). In opposition, she faces Springwater's Council majority and their

aligned interests. The Mayor's use of extraordinary powers, while legal under provincial statute, has led to her being painted as "anti-democratic" by opponents
- Her leadership style in this matter has effectively pitted her against the majority of her own Council and certain local stakeholders, isolating her politically within the Township even as she garners support from external authorities.
- Springwater Township Council (Opposition Bloc) – *Role:* The elected Council (excluding the Mayor) consists of the Deputy Mayor and councillors from various wards. A majority of these councillors have vehemently opposed the boundary deal as negotiated, and by extension, the Mayor's methods. Notable figures include Deputy Mayor George Cabral and Councillors Anita Moore, Jack Fisher, Perry Ritchie, Wanda Alexander, and Mark Garwood (names based on context; Moore, Fisher, Alexander, Garwood played prominent roles in motions) who have spearheaded motions and legal actions. *Influence:* As a bloc, Council wields substantial local legislative power – they passed numerous resolutions to block or condition the deal, hired legal counsel, and can authorize legal proceedings. However, their power was repeatedly undercut by the Mayor's provincially-backed veto and by-law tools. Despite that, Council's persistence effectively stalled local implementation of the deal and drew public attention. They also leveraged public opinion and procedural rules to their advantage. *Motivations:* The Council majority's stated motivation is to protect Springwater's autonomy and best interests. They believe the Barrie deal (as proposed) is unfavorable – particularly the loss of certain employment lands and the risk of Springwater becoming dependent on Barrie for services without sufficient compensation. Many councillors are also driven by process and principle: they object to the Mayor's strong-arm tactics and see them as a subversion of local democracy. This bloc pushed instead for either rejecting the deal or significantly altering it (e.g. smaller land transfer, no cross-border servicing). Some councillors appear allied with local development interests that prefer Springwater to retain control (for instance, they worked closely with the MLG developers to plan Springwater-led growth). *Affiliations:* This Council bloc is aligned with Loopstra Nixon LLP (their chosen legal counsel) and has found support from Simcoe County and Oro-Medonte officials who also questioned the deal's scope. They have the implicit backing of certain community groups or residents who are skeptical of Barrie's intentions. There are hints that some councillors' positions dovetail with the interests of the Midhurst Landowners Group (who would rather see Springwater develop its own lands). Council's relationship with the Mayor is openly adversarial – communications have broken down to the point of lawsuits and investigations into the Mayor's actions. They also positioned themselves in opposition to provincial pressure: by publicly releasing legal opinions and petitioning the Minister, they signaled willingness to defy the province's preferred

outcome if it harmed Springwater. Internally, the bloc operated as a tight unit to check the Mayor's power (e.g. voting unanimously on critical motions, and even holding meetings without her). *Strategic Implication:* This group commands local legitimacy (as the majority voice of Springwater's elected representatives) and can rally local support; any communications plan must reckon with their narrative, which has painted the Mayor as overstepping her mandate

- Moving forward, re-engaging this group will be challenging – trust is eroded. Their influence could manifest in continued legal challenges or, eventually, electoral consequences.
- City of Barrie (Mayor Alex Nuttall and Council) – *Role:* The municipality seeking annexation of Springwater lands. Barrie's Mayor, Alex Nuttall, is a key player who negotiated the framework deal with Mayor Coughlin. Barrie's Council approved the deal and adhered to the province's facilitation timeline. *Influence:* High influence on the outcome – Barrie is the "taker" of the land and the intended beneficiary of boundary expansion. Barrie leveraged its position by refusing to extend municipal services to Springwater developments without a boundary adjustment, effectively forcing the issue. Mayor Nuttall's collaboration with Mayor Coughlin carried weight with the Province (demonstrating inter-municipal consensus at the leadership level). Barrie's role in the facilitation and its readiness to accept annexation terms made it a central figure for the provincial decision-makers. *Motivations:* Barrie's motivations are straightforward: secure additional land for growth (housing and employment) to meet provincial growth targets, and ensure any future development on those lands happens under Barrie's jurisdiction (and taxation). Barrie also wanted to solve servicing issues along its boundary on its terms; the city was unwilling to service Springwater projects (like the Bayfield St corridor MZOs) unless those areas became part of Barrie. In the negotiated framework, Barrie agreed to pay compensation and provide infrastructure because it would gain significant future assessment and meet its housing unit goals. *Affiliations and Relationships:* Barrie's Mayor aligned closely with Springwater's Mayor throughout negotiations – the two presented a united front to their councils and the public initially (e.g., joint statements of principles). However, Barrie's relationship with Springwater's Council was strained; Barrie's overtures (like Mayor Nuttall's presentation on May 21) were rebuffed by Springwater councillors. Barrie also coordinated with the Province's facilitator, adhering to the process and timelines set by the Ministry. Within Barrie, there was likely consensus that the deal was advantageous, and Barrie's Council voted to approve it (the exact date isn't in our docs, but mid-October was indicated). Strategically, Barrie stands to gain regardless of Springwater's internal drama – if the Province implements annexation, Barrie gets land. However, Barrie is also wary of maintaining a good relationship with the province and

avoiding any impression of bad faith. As such, Barrie's Mayor has signaled willingness (at least to Springwater's Mayor) to honor the "handshake" agreements on servicing and compensation even if the province's legislation doesn't compel them

- Going forward, Barrie's cooperation is crucial for implementing servicing plans; their influence is something Springwater's communications must manage by keeping Barrie publicly committed to the agreed terms. In the power map, Barrie is an ally of Mayor Coughlin (they share the goal of the deal) and an opponent to Springwater's Council majority (Barrie's interests are served by bypassing that opposition). Barrie also interacts with the Province closely, as an eager participant in the province's growth agenda.
- Government of Ontario (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing – Hon. Rob Flack, and the Provincial Government) – *Role:* The ultimate authority over municipal boundaries. The Province initiated the "strong mayor" experiment to advance housing goals and set up the facilitated negotiation. Now, the Minister (MMAH) will decide how to resolve the impasse, likely through legislation or a directive changing the Springwater-Barrie boundary. *Influence:* Paramount. The Province can unilaterally redraw boundaries and impose conditions (or leave conditions to the municipalities). It also holds financial levers (infrastructure funding, etc.) that can reward or penalize municipalities. Early in the process, the Province empowered Mayor Coughlin specifically by granting her the strong-mayor tools on May 1, 2025, explicitly linking those powers to provincial priorities like housing. Thus, the Province set the stage for her to act. Through the facilitator, the Province tried to guide the municipalities to a mutual agreement. When that failed, the Province prepared to step in decisively
- Minister Flack's forthcoming decision is expected to finalize what lands Barrie gets and possibly any transitional arrangements. *Motivations:* The Ontario government's primary motivation is to accelerate housing development to address the provincial housing crisis. This boundary adjustment was one of several provincial interventions to free up land for housing (the strong-mayor powers and facilitator were tools toward that end). The Province is less concerned with *who* gets credit or local political squabbles, and more concerned that land needed for growth is made available and serviced in time. However, the Province also wants to avoid setting bad precedents or causing instability – it prefers municipalities to agree. In this case, faced with a stalemate, the Province's motivation is to impose a solution that aligns with its objectives: likely a boundary expansion of Barrie that enables significant new housing. That said, the Province showed *some* sensitivity to Springwater Council's input during facilitation (e.g., the facilitator did convey Council's "no" position). Still, provincial officials made it clear that anything short of a clear "yes" to the deal would be

taken as a “no” – in other words, Springwater’s conditional approvals were deemed rejections

- This indicates the Province’s motivation to get a clean resolution, even if it meant overriding local conditions. *Affiliations and Relationships:* The Province (Minister Flack and the Ministry staff) worked through Facilitator Dan Mathieson (and earlier Jeff Schelling) as their liaison. They maintained formal distance during negotiations – all communications with Springwater went “through the facilitator” by design
- As the impasse deepened, the Province aligned more with the Mayor’s position, since she was using the powers they granted to advance what they see as a provincial priority (housing supply). Provincial representatives likely view the Springwater Council majority as obstructive to provincial housing mandates. Nevertheless, the Minister must consider the optics and legalities of the Council’s valid concerns (especially if the dispute lands in court or becomes a public controversy). The Province’s relationship with Barrie’s leadership is strong – Barrie is a willing partner in growth. With Springwater’s Mayor, the Province has a cooperative if somewhat fraught relationship (they empowered her and expect her to deliver results; her inability to bring Council along is a complication). With Springwater’s Council, the Province’s relationship is strained – Council has appealed to the Province for redress while simultaneously opposing provincial priorities by rejecting the deal. Strategically for communications: the Province holds the trump card, and our team must keep the Province onside. That means framing Springwater’s messaging in terms of *achieving provincial priorities* (which legitimizes the Mayor’s actions)
- and demonstrating that accepting the deal (with conditions) serves the broader public interest. Any appeal to the Province must acknowledge their goals first and foremost.
- Provincial Facilitator – Dan Mathieson (formerly Jeff Schelling) – *Role:* An appointed mediator by the province to shepherd discussions between Springwater and Barrie (and indirectly involve Simcoe County and Oro-Medonte). Mathieson is a respected former mayor (Stratford) with experience in municipal affairs. He convened meetings, proposed compromises, and acted as a go-between for the Minister. *Influence:* Moderate. While the facilitator had no formal power to impose decisions, he was the eyes and ears of the Minister on the ground. Mathieson’s reports and recommendations likely shaped Minister Flack’s view of the situation. He also had personal influence in urging parties toward common ground. By the end, his pronouncement that the process was “formally finished” signaled to all that the baton passed to the Minister
- *Motivations:* To fulfill his mandate of achieving an agreement or, failing that, to clearly document the points of disagreement. As a representative of the province,

he wanted a deal aligned with provincial objectives (housing, growth) and tried to minimize conflict. It's likely he suggested creative solutions (e.g., phasing of land transfers or side agreements) to bridge the gap, but once it became clear Springwater's Council would not agree, his duty was to end the talks and let the province act. *Affiliations:* The facilitator worked with all sides but ultimately is an agent of the Province. He maintained communication with both Springwater's Mayor and councillors – for instance, he personally called councillors to explain when the facilitation ended

- Mathieson also interacted with Simcoe County and Oro-Medonte officials as needed, since they were stakeholders in discussions. Once the facilitator stepped away, his influence ended; however, his final briefing to the Minister likely carried significant weight. In terms of relationships: he was seen as neutral, but the Mayor may have viewed him as an ally since the process he led produced a deal she wanted. Council likely viewed him more warily (perhaps feeling he favored the provincial viewpoint). Going forward, he might not feature publicly, but any communications to provincial audiences should respect the work done during facilitation (e.g. acknowledge that the facilitator's process yielded an agreement endorsed by one of the two councils).
- Loopstra Nixon LLP (External Legal Counsel to Springwater Council) – *Role:* A law firm specializing in municipal law, retained by Springwater's Council to provide legal opinions and to represent the Township (as per Council's direction) in actions related to the boundary dispute. Loopstra Nixon (notably lawyer John Mascarin was involved via a separate opinion from Aird & Berlis, but Loopstra is the primary counsel) was tasked with assessing the Barrie proposal's legal implications and later with challenging the Mayor's strong-mayor actions. *Influence:* Significant behind the scenes. Loopstra's early legal opinion (July 2025) armed Council with arguments and resolve to oppose the deal – Council even shared this opinion with neighboring municipalities in confidence. When conflict escalated, Loopstra became Council's instrument to push back legally: Council directed them to file court applications and injunctions in November. A court's receptiveness to Loopstra's arguments (e.g., an injunction stopping the Mayor's by-law) could dramatically alter the power dynamic. Even the knowledge that Council had lawyers ready to act affected stakeholder behavior (for instance, the Mayor's drastic step to fire them underscores how pivotal Loopstra's role was). *Motivations:* As legal professionals, their motivation is to serve their client (the Council/Township as instructed by the Council majority). They likely believe in the merits of Council's case: that the Mayor exceeded her authority and that due process must be upheld. There's also an implication in communications discussions that Loopstra's team may have been sympathetic to (or aligned with)

certain private interests – the Gestalt strategy document suggests Loopstra was effectively part of an “active campaign” with the opposition bloc and developers

- Loopstra’s broader motivation could simply be to ensure Springwater doesn’t lose rights unjustly and that any provincial actions can be challenged if legally inappropriate. *Affiliations:* Loopstra works closely with the Council bloc (especially Councillor Fisher and others driving legal motions). They provided opinions alongside other firms like Aird & Berlis, indicating a network of municipal law experts reinforcing Council’s stance. The firm’s relationship with the Mayor’s side is hostile – Mayor Coughlin explicitly tried to terminate their engagement. Loopstra likely coordinated with Simcoe County’s legal perspective as well, since Springwater shared confidential materials with the County. Strategically, Loopstra is both a shield and sword for Council: a shield in providing legal justification to withstand provincial/Mayor’s pressure, and a sword in actively litigating. For communications, the existence of a credible legal challenge boosts Council’s bargaining power (and has been cited in messaging to the province that litigation is pending). Conversely, from the Mayor’s communication standpoint, Loopstra can be portrayed as having a potential conflict of interest (given they also represent developers in other matters, perhaps) to undermine the opposition’s moral high ground
- Ultimately, Loopstra’s effectiveness in court or the threat thereof is a key factor in the power balance.
- Affleck Greene McMurtry LLP (AGM Lawyers – William McLennan, Michael Binetti) – *Role:* A Toronto-based litigation firm retained by Mayor Coughlin (technically by the Township, via the Mayor’s direction) as alternate legal counsel once the dispute over Loopstra arose. AGM Lawyers are effectively representing the Mayor/Township in defending the Mayor’s use of powers and strategizing on the overall boundary issue. They stepped in around mid-November, likely preparing for any provincial legal processes or to respond to Council’s court actions. *Influence:* Moderately high. AGM provides the Mayor with legal backing independent of the hostile Council. By engaging AGM, the Mayor ensured she had lawyers to act on directives (for instance, if the Township needs representation in provincial negotiations or to argue the Mayor’s case in court). William McLennan (AGM partner) has been actively advising the Mayor – he led the Nov 19 strategy call from the legal angle
- AGM’s influence can be seen in the coordinated approach to salvage the situation: they are likely advising the Mayor on the limits of Council’s powers versus hers, and on how to involve the Province in a way that moots Council’s resistance (for example, once the Province legislates, Council’s legal challenges might become irrelevant). *Motivations:* To achieve the objectives of their client (the Mayor’s camp) – namely, to secure the boundary adjustment on favorable

terms and to ensure the Mayor's actions are legally protected. AGM was retained on a crisis basis, so their motivation is also to prove effective quickly (they have a three-month retainer to stabilize the situation). They will be focused on preventing any court injunctions that derail the provincial solution and on positioning the Township (Mayor) optimally in any negotiations with Queen's Park. *Affiliations:* AGM is directly affiliated with the Mayor and her supporting staff (CAO, etc.). Importantly, AGM engaged Gestalt Communications as a subcontractor to handle PR, indicating a tight integration of legal and communications strategy. AGM's lawyers liaise with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (likely through formal channels if needed) and possibly coordinate with Barrie's legal counsel to ensure any provincial instrument reflects the framework terms. Their relationship with Loopstra is adversarial – effectively two sets of lawyers on opposite sides of the issue representing different instructions from the same municipality. That's a highly unusual situation, and it underscores the governance confusion. In the eyes of stakeholders: the province would view AGM's involvement as a sign that the Mayor is lawyering up to push the deal through (which could be reassuring to the province that the Mayor's side is serious and prepared). Council views AGM with suspicion, seeing them as "hired guns" brought in by the Mayor to circumvent Council's will. For communications, AGM's presence is a message that the Mayor's camp is legally fortified. It also means our team must coordinate public messaging carefully through legal lenses – ensuring we don't prejudice any legal arguments.

- Gestalt Communications (Consultants to Springwater/Mayor's Office) – *Role:* A strategic communications and public affairs firm (our firm) retained in November 2025 to assist Springwater (via AGM) in managing the crisis. Gestalt's mandate includes media relations, message development, public strategy, and crisis management for the Mayor's Office/Township
- Essentially, Gestalt functions as the communications arm for Mayor Coughlin's side of the dispute, aiming to shape public narrative and stakeholder perceptions in favor of a successful boundary adjustment implementation. *Influence:* Soft power influence, but important. Gestalt does not make decisions, but we influence how decisions are perceived. In the power map, Gestalt's influence comes from crafting messaging that can maintain or build public support for the Mayor, and from conducting behind-the-scenes outreach to key stakeholders (media, community leaders, perhaps provincial contacts in a public affairs capacity). Given the highly charged atmosphere, Gestalt's ability to reframe issues and put out timely information can impact political pressure – for instance, countering misinformation or exposing the opposition's motives could sway some public sympathy back to the Mayor. Gestalt also monitors social and traditional

media, providing situational awareness to the team (e.g., tracking if the “tyranny” narrative is taking hold) and enabling rapid responses

- *Motivations:* To see the Mayor (and by extension, the Township’s interests) succeed in securing the full benefits of the deal and to restore a measure of public trust or at least understanding of the Mayor’s actions. As outlined in our proposal, Gestalt’s strategy is built on four pillars: reframing the narrative toward community benefits, clarifying the legitimate use of strong-mayor powers, challenging the opposition’s narrative (especially where conflict of interest or hypocrisy exists), and ensuring Springwater’s voice is heard at the provincial table
- Gestalt, of course, is also motivated to demonstrate value in a high-profile file and achieve a positive outcome that could serve as a case study for crisis communications. *Affiliations:* Gestalt was brought in through AGM Lawyers and thus works closely with AGM (William, Michael) and directly with Mayor Coughlin and her staff (e.g. CAO Stacey, Communications officer Renée)
- We coordinate with Barrie’s communications (in planning a joint statement) and also indirectly engage with media outlets covering the story. Gestalt does not interface with Council’s opposition bloc except insofar as responding to their public statements. In fact, the opposition may see Gestalt’s involvement as an escalation in the “PR battle.” From a relationship standpoint, Gestalt is an ally to Mayor Coughlin, an adversary to the Council majority’s messaging, and a partner to Barrie’s and the Province’s communications channels when aligning messages about provincial priorities. Strategically, Gestalt’s involvement means the Mayor’s camp is no longer ceding the public narrative to opponents; our work is aimed at turning the story from “Springwater in chaos” to “Springwater’s leadership making the best of a provincially mandated situation.” We must navigate carefully, as overzealous communications could inflame Council or alarm the province – the tone must remain professional, emphasizing facts and the greater good, to ultimately support a more unified path once the provincial decision is out.
- Midhurst Landowners Group (MLG) – *Role:* A consortium of major developers in Springwater’s Midhurst area. They have a vested interest in the Township’s planning decisions because they are building a large residential community (the Midhurst Secondary Plan) within Springwater. The boundary adjustment does not directly give their lands to Barrie (their lands are more central in Springwater), but it affects the context of growth and infrastructure for the region. MLG has been actively participating by providing data and opinions to Springwater Council – for example, they gave input on the capacity of Springwater’s wastewater plant and supported expanding Springwater’s settlement boundaries instead of transferring lands to Barrie. *Influence:* Moderate. The MLG’s influence is twofold: economic and informational. Economically, they are significant investors in Springwater’s

future (the build-out of Midhurst means new homes, tax base, development charges, etc.), so their stance carries weight with some on Council who prioritize that growth. They also engaged in the process by writing letters and appearing in meetings, thereby influencing the narrative that Springwater *can* handle growth internally if allowed. Council often cited MLG-provided data to justify positions (e.g. using the MLG's study to argue Springwater's plant could service the contentious Bayfield corridor lands). *Motivations:* MLG's primary motivation is to ensure their development plans proceed with maximum advantage. They would prefer infrastructure decisions that favor their project – for instance, if Springwater kept more lands, it could justify expanding and investing in the Midhurst infrastructure which also serves MLG's needs. Conversely, if Barrie annexes and takes charge of regional infrastructure, MLG might worry about losing control or facing competition. Notably, MLG supported Springwater Council's idea to extend the Midhurst plan area toward Hwy 400, suggesting they favored Springwater retaining lands and perhaps eventually partnering with them to service those instead of handing to Barrie. MLG likely opposes losing the employment lands to Barrie because those could have housed businesses that complement the new Midhurst population (or because MLG members own some lands near those areas – unclear, but possible). Additionally, if Springwater were weakened (financially or in growth potential) by the deal, that could indirectly hurt MLG's investment environment. *Affiliations:* MLG allied itself with the Springwater Council majority throughout 2025. They provided supportive correspondence for Council's initiatives and coordinated on technical work (the Township's engineer did peer reviews of MLG's servicing claims, etc.). One could view MLG and Council as having a mutual benefit alliance: Council fights off annexation, and MLG gets a better chance to develop under Springwater's jurisdiction. The communications from the Mayor's side have painted "developers with vested interests" as part of the opposition

- – MLG fits that description. It's insinuated that certain councillors' intransigence might be influenced by developers who prefer the status quo or have their own plans for the lands in question. MLG's relationship with the Mayor was likely strained; the Mayor's willingness to partner with Barrie threatened to circumvent MLG's desired growth path in Springwater. Strategically, MLG can rally community support by framing themselves as promoting *Springwater-first* growth (they did talk about delivering economic benefits to the Township by leveraging local development). From a power map perspective, MLG is an informal power player aligned with Council's resistance. For our communications planning, this means we must anticipate and counter arguments put forth by MLG (especially if they go public with critiques, e.g. "Springwater is giving away future economic lands unnecessarily"). Any narrative about "protecting Springwater from private

interests” in our messaging is essentially pointing at groups like MLG, to suggest the opposition is partly about developers’ profits vs. public good

- Bayfield Corridor Developers (Remington Group & Paul Sadlon Communities) – *Role:* These are two developers who own parcels at Springwater’s southern tip along Bayfield Street, adjacent to Barrie. They obtained Ministerial Zoning Orders (MZOs) in 2023 to fast-track development of those lands (likely for mixed-use or residential projects). Their projects became a focal point in the dispute because of the question of servicing: originally, it was undecided whether Barrie or Springwater would provide water/wastewater to these new developments. In July 2025, Springwater Council revoked its support for the MZOs unless these developers agreed to connect to Springwater’s own systems. This put the developers in a tough spot – connecting to Springwater’s Midhurst plant would require extending pipes northward (potentially slower or costlier), whereas connecting to Barrie’s network (just south of their sites) would be more convenient but would require cross-border service or annexation. *Influence:* Limited direct political power (they are not the size of MLG in influence), but they have provincial attention by virtue of their MZOs (an MZO indicates the province considered their projects important for housing). Their situation was frequently referenced in discussions as a case that needed resolution – indeed, Mayor Coughlin’s Sept 3 strong-mayor by-law explicitly aimed to include “cross-border servicing for the Bayfield St corridor” developments. This suggests these developers had at least the ear of the Mayor and perhaps provincial actors who didn’t want these housing projects stalled. They also could lobby the province directly, given they had MZOs (which typically involve Ministry approval). *Motivations:* To get their projects built and sold as efficiently as possible. That means securing reliable servicing. Their ideal outcome would be whichever governing arrangement guarantees servicing in time for their development timelines. If Barrie annexes the land or provides servicing, fine – the developers likely don’t mind being in Barrie if it expedites growth (though it might change fee structures, etc.). Alternatively, if remaining in Springwater but Springwater partners with Barrie to service them, that also works. The worst case for them would be a protracted fight where servicing is tied up or if Springwater cannot deliver capacity when needed. Initially, they got Springwater’s support via MZOs, but Council’s reversal in July 2025 would have alarmed them – it added uncertainty and potentially delay (if Springwater’s plant needed expansion to accommodate them, for example). Thus, these developers probably leaned toward any solution that reinstated a quick servicing plan – Mayor Coughlin’s willingness to negotiate cross-border servicing directly addressed their problem. *Affiliations:* They engaged with Springwater Council and the Province through the MZO process. After Council’s change of heart, they likely aligned more with

Mayor Coughlin and Barrie's interests, since the Mayor's stance was more favorable to them (she essentially tried to undo Council's servicing restriction to accommodate them). There isn't explicit evidence that they campaigned publicly, but behind the scenes they may have pressed the facilitator or province to ensure their developments wouldn't be casualties of the political impasse. Council, in its July motion, did send notice of their servicing condition to these developers and the Minister, so all parties were aware of Council's stance. Strategically, in the power map these Bayfield developers are somewhat in the middle: not overtly political, but their projects became a bargaining chip. The Province certainly wants those housing units realized (hence granting MZOs), so the Minister will account for their needs in any decision (likely by making sure the lands get serviced one way or another). For communications, these developers haven't been vilified like others, perhaps because their interest (building housing) aligns with provincial priorities. If anything, they could be case studies for why cooperation is needed: e.g., "We have approved housing projects on the border that risk delays unless this boundary issue is resolved." Our messaging can highlight that the Mayor's approach was about ensuring these approved housing projects can proceed with proper servicing – turning what was a contentious point into a positive example of solving a problem.

- Simcoe County (Upper-tier municipality) and Oro-Medonte Township (neighboring lower-tier) – *Role:* Both are stakeholders due to geography and governance. Springwater and Oro-Medonte are part of Simcoe County (Barrie is a separated single-tier city). The County and Oro were involved in the joint land needs study and early discussions because any Barrie expansion affects regional planning. Oro-Medonte in particular was initially roped in when early 2023 talks considered some Oro lands for annexation as well. While the final proposal before the province focuses on Springwater lands, Oro-Medonte remains concerned that its lands or infrastructure (roads, etc.) are indirectly impacted. Simcoe County has an interest in preserving its tax base and ensuring orderly development – each acre annexed to Barrie is an acre removed from County jurisdiction. *Influence:* Moderate. The County's influence is mostly persuasive/political: Simcoe County Council passed a motion in November advocating a much smaller boundary adjustment (only specific parcels S1, S2, S3). This was a significant intervention; it gave the province and province-aligned officials a signal that the broader local community (beyond Springwater alone) favored restraint. The County Warden (and council, composed of mayors including Springwater's and Oro's) can lobby the province. While the province isn't obligated to heed the County, the County's position could bolster Springwater Council's case. Oro-Medonte's Mayor and Council likely echoed Springwater's concerns about process (Oro wrote a letter about the facilitation in

March 2025). Oro-Medonte's influence might come through its MPP or through the County council (since Oro's Mayor sits on County council). Both County and Oro were kept in the loop: Springwater shared confidential legal opinions with them, reflecting an alliance. *Motivations:* Protect local interests. Simcoe County wants to minimize land loss to Barrie and ensure that if lands are transferred, any broader agreements (like financial or service arrangements) are fair to the remaining County taxpayers. The County also champions a "regional approach" to growth that doesn't simply reward Barrie at the expense of its townships. Oro-Medonte wants to make sure its lands aren't unexpectedly grabbed and that it isn't left out of discussions (earlier inclusion of Oro lands in maps without Oro's knowledge – similar to Springwater's grievance – would make Oro officials very wary). Both also share an interest in transparent process – they supported Springwater Council's push for answers on how the annexation mapping came about. *Affiliations:* Simcoe County's leadership sided with Springwater Council's position overall. The County's Nov 4 motion essentially mirrored Councillor Moore's approach (small parcels only, rest no), indicating alignment with Springwater's council majority. Oro-Medonte, too, would align with Springwater in resisting any large annexation that might set a precedent (Oro wouldn't want Barrie or Orillia eyeing its lands next). During facilitation, County and Oro officials participated in some meetings – there was a tri-municipal aspect early on – so they are formally stakeholders in the facilitator's reports. Neither the County nor Oro can veto the province's decision, but their cooperation is needed for any infrastructure or transitional arrangements. For example, roads or services crossing municipal boundaries often involve the County; if Barrie annexes, there will be assets to apportion. Strategically, from the communications perspective, the County and Oro are sympathetic voices for Springwater's concerns. They add credibility when arguing that the initial proposal was too expansive or that process was flawed (it's not just Springwater complaining – others noticed issues). For the Mayor's team, however, the County's opposition is an obstacle to overcome. We may need to engage with County officials to assure them that Springwater (under the Mayor's approach) did fight for compensation and servicing which actually benefits the region. In the power map, Simcoe County and Oro-Medonte stand as institutional allies to Springwater Council and as a moderating influence on the Province (urging a limited annexation). Post-decision, maintaining good relations with them will be important for regional cooperation.

- Springwater Residents and Community Groups – *Role:* The citizens of Springwater Township, who will ultimately live with the outcome. They are not a monolithic bloc; opinions likely vary. Some residents (especially in affected areas) might oppose annexation, valuing their community identity or fearing higher taxes

in Barrie. Others might support the deal, seeing benefits like new services or simply wanting an end to uncertainty. Community groups or ratepayer associations could have taken positions during public meetings. While residents don't directly decide, their voices influence councillors and overall legitimacy. Notably, the controversy over the Mayor's strong-mayor actions spurred public discourse – terms like "tyrannical" were used by critics, possibly resonating with democratic-minded citizens

- Google Drive
- . *Influence:* Indirect but important. Residents influence the political climate – Council's hardline stance is undoubtedly bolstered by constituents lobbying them to "save Springwater" or expressing outrage at the Mayor's bypassing of council. Public sentiment can also pressure the Province; if there were significant public outcry either for or against the annexation, the Minister would take that into account to avoid fallout. Turnout at town halls or the tone of local media coverage (letters to editor, social media) provides a gauge. The Mayor's low public support for her approach (if polls or protests indicated such) would weaken her moral authority, whereas if many residents vocally support getting the deal done, that would bolster her. We know the opposition tried to frame the narrative to sway residents – focusing on the Mayor's extraordinary powers rather than the deal's content
- Google Drive
- . This suggests that at least a portion of the public was receptive to arguments about governmental overreach. *Motivations:* Residents are motivated by community identity, governance, and practical outcomes. Many moved to or live in Springwater for a more rural or small-town environment; a boundary adjustment with a city can feel threatening to that identity. They want transparency (as reflected in Council's motion emphasizing residents' right to accountability) and to ensure that any change truly benefits the community. If the deal's benefits (like new infrastructure, recreation amenities, or the $22 million fund) are clearly communicated, residents might support it – but if the process seems anti-democratic, that support erodes. Also, residents near the boundary are directly impacted (they could become Barrie residents overnight); their motivations might differ – some might prefer Barrie's services, others fear losing township community ties. *Affiliations:* Public opinion was actively courted by the Council majority – councillors regularly messaged that they were standing up for the community against a power grab. On the other side, Mayor Coughlin's supporters (perhaps a minority of residents) have tried to stress the big-picture vision. Local media and social media groups became battlegrounds for these views. For example, opposition messaging cast the Mayor's camp as undemocratic, while any support for the Mayor would focus on facts about the

deal's benefits (the Mayor's newsletter or statements likely tried to justify her actions as necessary). Strategically, the residents are the audience for much of our communications work. Winning the narrative among residents means the difference between a pyrrhic victory and a mandate to move forward. The Mayor's communications team aims to "regain control of the public narrative"

- Google Drive
- by highlighting that she acted in good faith for the community's long-term good. We also plan positive community engagement (e.g. if the deal goes through, hosting town halls to explain what Springwater gains). Meanwhile, the opposition will keep appealing to residents' emotions (protecting democracy, preventing "losing our township"). Residents' feedback will influence how the Township proceeds post-announcement – for instance, if residents accept the outcome and appreciate the improvements, the political tension can ease; if not, it could persist in protests or in the 2026 municipal election. In the power map, Springwater's residents are the ground over which the battle for legitimacy is fought – they indirectly empower either the Mayor or councillors by siding with one narrative or the other.
- Media and Public Discourse (Local Press, Social Media) – *Role:* While not a single stakeholder per se, the media has been the conduit and amplifier of information and opinions. Local news outlets (like Barrie Today, Simcoe.com, CTV Barrie) have covered the story, and their framing can influence broader perception. Social media (Facebook community groups, Twitter, etc.) has allowed narratives ("#StrongMayor", etc.) to spread. *Influence:* The media shapes external perceptions (for example, how the provincial audience sees the dispute) and can influence provincial political calculations. If the media narrative is that Springwater Council is fighting for democratic principles against an imposed deal, the province might tread carefully. If instead the narrative is Springwater's dysfunction is risking housing goals, the province might step in more sternly. Media also affects stakeholder morale – positive coverage of one side can embolden that side. *Motivations:* Media outlets are motivated to report compelling stories that interest their audience. In this case, the "David vs Goliath" angle (small township council vs strong mayor powers & provincial push) is one storyline, as is the human element of a community divided. They strive for quotes from all sides, sometimes highlighting the conflict over the substance. Social media participants are motivated by personal stakes or political leanings (some may have partisan views on the province's strong-mayor initiative, projecting that onto Springwater's case). *Affiliations:* Local journalists have been talking to councillors, the Mayor, and community members. It's likely the opposition councillors engaged more with media early on, as the Mayor's team was only recently reinforced with communications support. We've begun to proactively

engage media to ensure the Mayor's perspective (the benefits of the deal and the rationale for her actions) is understood. Strategically, treating "media" as a stakeholder means continuing to feed clear, factual information and key messages to outlets, correcting misconceptions (for example, emphasizing that without the deal Springwater could lose the land *and* get nothing, which is worse for residents). The media's portrayal going forward will impact how easily the township can mend fences: a narrative of "everyone coming together after provincial decision" would help; a narrative of "Springwater Mayor crushed council democracy" would prolong acrimony. Our aim is to steer media and public discourse towards the former, especially once the province acts.

Strategic Relationship Dynamics: The relationships among these stakeholders form a complex web of alliances and oppositions, which can be visualized in a power map diagram. At the center is the Springwater boundary adjustment issue, with Springwater Township itself effectively split into two factions (Mayor vs. Council). Mayor Coughlin is aligned with Barrie's Mayor Nuttall and the Provincial government, creating a powerful alliance pushing the boundary deal forward (imagine them on one side of the diagram, connected by shared goals). Supporting the Mayor are her AGM legal counsel and Gestalt communications team, who interface with the province and media on her behalf (they would be nodes attached to the Mayor, reinforcing her link to the Province). On the opposite side stands the Springwater Council majority, allied with certain developers like MLG and buoyed by Simcoe County/Oro-Medonte's support for limiting annexation (these would cluster around Council in the diagram). Loopstra Nixon is depicted next to Council, being their instrument to challenge the Mayor through the courts. The Council bloc's connection to the public is strong – they tapped into community sentiments about transparency and local control (a line from Council to Residents/Public indicating influence). The public/media node likely sits somewhat between the two sides: initially closer to Council's narrative due to the outcry over strong-mayor powers, but a key target for the Mayor's re-framing efforts (hence arrows from Gestalt and the Mayor toward the Public, attempting to pull that node toward the Mayor's side with messages about community benefits and housing). Barrie connects upwards to the Province (since Barrie needs provincial approval and has been cooperating with the province's process), and Barrie also has a direct line to the Mayor (their agreement). Simcoe County and Oro-Medonte connect into the Council side (reinforcing Council's stance to the Province). The Province ultimately towers above – an arrow from the Province to the outcome signifies that Minister Flack's decision will override local disputes, essentially cutting the Gordian knot. In text form, we can describe the influence diagram as follows: The Province (top of the hierarchy) is linked strongly to Barrie and to Springwater's Mayor, who have both aligned with its housing agenda. Opposite them, Springwater Council (lower left) forms an alliance with County/Oro and supportive developers (MLG), jointly resisting the full proposal. The Mayor and Council are in direct conflict (shown by

a lightning bolt or red line between them), each claiming to represent the “Township.” Flanking the Mayor, her Legal (AGM) and Comms (Gestalt) advisors bolster her position towards the Province and public (arrows from the Mayor to Province and Public labeled “negotiation” and “messaging”). Flanking the Council, Loopstra provides the legal muscle (arrow from Council to an icon of a judge, indicating court actions) and community voices amplify Council’s message (arrow from Council to Public labeled “public support”). The Public/Residents sit at the bottom center – initially drawn toward Council by democratic sentiment, but now being tugged in the other direction by promises of community benefits (we illustrate this by a two-headed arrow between Public and the two Springwater factions). Finally, bridging the gap, Barrie’s Mayor and Springwater’s Mayor are shown joining hands in a planned joint statement once the Province acts (symbolizing that ultimately the municipalities must cooperate post-decision). This conceptual map highlights that while the Province holds ultimate power, the legitimacy and smooth implementation of its decision will depend on realigning these relationships – bringing Springwater’s local factions back together and ensuring stakeholders like Barrie, developers, and residents all buy into the path forward. In conclusion, the boundary adjustment saga has evolved through political, legal, and public relations battles. Understanding the timeline of events and the stakeholders’ power dynamics is crucial for crafting our go-forward strategy. As the file transitions to the province’s decisive phase, our team will focus on leveraging the identified alliances (with Barrie and Queen’s Park) and mitigating opposition influences by transparently communicating the community benefits at stake. The “power map” of stakeholders serves as a guide to where we must concentrate influence: fortifying support from key decision-makers, neutralizing or co-opting opposition voices, and keeping the public informed and onside as Springwater moves into the next chapter of this boundary adjustment process.