Gestalt Communications

Communications Strategy

Town of Springwater

Privileged and Confidential
Date: November 26, 2025

Purpose of the Document

The purpose of this Communications Master Strategy is to provide a comprehensive framework for advising the Town of Springwater on communications and key messages to all stakeholders. It ensures a consistent, compelling, and pillar-anchored narrative that supports the legal strategy and focuses on the best interests of the community.

Top 3 Key Messages

As we move into the next phase of communications, it is important that we anchor every public interaction in the same core foundation. To support consistency, credibility, and message discipline, we recommend that you use the three key messages below as your primary talking points across all settings.

To ensure these messages land effectively:

- These should open every interview - ideally within the first answer.
- At community events, they should appear in the first 60 seconds of your remarks.
- When responding to resident questions, return to one or more of these points before addressing specifics.

1. "The Province has made its decision, and Springwater will soon have clarity on boundaries. My focus right now is on moving forward and providing long-term certainty for our community, particularly regarding the servicing needed for our residents' homes and future housing needs."
2. "Our responsibility now is to secure the best possible outcome for Springwater by finalizing the agreement with Barrie. This is the only path to ensure we secure the necessary residential servicing, financial stability, and coordinated growth that our families need."
3. "We will continue to work together as a Council and keep residents informed as the next steps unfold. My commitment is to listen, communicate clearly, and do what is in the best interest of our community's future."

FAQ

Category 1: Challenging the Framework

Question: The Province is legislating to move the land to Barrie. Does that mean the servicing for Springwater is guaranteed?

Answer: "We have worked tirelessly to negotiate a deal with Barrie that serves the best interests of Springwater's residents. Now that the province will legislate the land boundary changes, the next step for us is to complete the final agreement so Springwater receives what was negotiated—specifically, the critical servicing capacity required for our residential areas. I am glad that Barrie's mayor has also publicly committed to this residential servicing framework."

Question: Is the servicing agreement simply a 'handshake'?" What guarantees do you have?

Answer: "We already have a framework for an agreement with the City of Barrie. Our staff were hard at work for over a year to ensure Springwater gets the best possible servicing deal and compensation to support our housing needs. It's thanks to that forward-looking strategic approach that we are in a strong position to finalize the details of an agreement that delivers for our residents."

Question: Critics say getting $22 million over several years for 1,600 hectares of prime land is 'pennies on the dollar.' How did you arrive at this valuation?

Answer: "Well, first of all, that $22 million is just one part of the equation. The real value for our residents is the hundreds of millions of dollars in servicing infrastructure that we now don't have to build or finance ourselves. By connecting to Barrie's system, we significantly manage the Township's exposure and avoid the massive financial risk associated with the alternative water treatment solutions."

Question: Mayor Nuttall has been aggressive about Barrie's need for land. Does this deal explicitly protect Springwater from further annexation attempts?

Answer: "This legislation draws a definitive line. It solves Barrie's land needs for the next 25 to 30 years, which gives Springwater the certainty we need to plan our own future residential growth without having to second guess. We've secured our independence by partnering on growth."

Category 2: Strong Mayor Powers

Question: "You used Strong Mayor Powers to override a clear 4-3 majority vote of your own Council. Is this how democracy is supposed to work in Springwater?"

Answer: "I know the use of these powers has raised concerns, and I hear that. However, failing to be part of the boundary adjustment and having a seat at the table created a real risk of losing

the servicing our residents rely on. I made a difficult decision to ensure Springwater remained involved so we could secure the infrastructure necessary for our community's housing needs. Now that the Province has finalized the boundary, my priority is ensuring Springwater receives exactly what was negotiated."

Question: "Did you privately ask Minister Flack to introduce this legislation to save you from your own Council?"

Answer: "Absolutely not. To my understanding, the Province acted on the recommendation of the Provincial Facilitator after 18 months of negotiations. The Province has taken this action to ensure housing and infrastructure goals were met for the entire region."

Question: "If the courts hear the application from the opposition councillors and rule that your use of the veto was illegal, will you resign?"

Answer: "I won't comment on ongoing judicial matters. However, I exercised my authority in good faith because I genuinely believed it was necessary to secure the servicing agreement. That agreement is critical to furthering the Provincial priorities of building residential housing and providing the infrastructure to support it. My priority remains ensuring Springwater receives the benefits of that agreement."

Question: "Why were so many of these discussions held in closed sessions or 'backrooms' with Mayor Nuttall?"

Answer: "To be clear, there were no back-door discussions. Municipalities are required from time to time to meet to discuss land and other matters confidentially. Very little direct conversation occurred outside of those requirements. The majority of this matter was discussed before Council in public, and residents were able to see and hear all of those discussions."

Category 3: Community Benefits

Question: "You keep mentioning 'benefits' for residents. Can you name one specific facility that is guaranteed?"

Answer: "This servicing agreement unlocks the specific infrastructure required to support residential development, including potential capacity for a Long-Term Care facility, a Hospice, and a new High School in Springwater. Without the servicing capacity from this deal, those residential-focused projects were effectively stalled."

Question: "When will a shovel hit the ground for the seniors' housing you've promised?"

Answer: "Because Barrie's capacity is ready now, we can move straight to the planning stages for these residential projects once the agreement is finalized. Under the old status quo, we were looking at a decade or more before the infrastructure would have been ready to support that housing."

Question: "The deal includes access to Barrie's waterfront parking and rec centers. Is that a permanent right?"

Answer: "Yes, this is a reciprocal partnership. Our residents will enjoy the same access as Barrie residents."

Question: "Your Council is deeply fractured. How do you expect to govern for the remainder of your term?"

Answer: "Council continues to work together to lead the Township of Springwater. I will continue to lead the Council with integrity, and our shared responsibility is to do what is best for the community. With the uncertainty behind us, we must all focus on the next steps and on delivering the projects and services residents expect."

Strategic Objectives

Tone

- Calm, confident, grounded, non-triumphal. No "I told you so."
- Gracious and collaborative with Province and Barrie.
- Empathetic toward residents who feel anxious.
- Firm but not defensive on the Strong Mayor question, anchoring it in Provincial Priorities (Housing).

Audience & Messaging Matrix

Relevant Audience(s)	Relevant Audience(s)	Communications Goal
● Align with legal strategy & proceedings	● Council Meetings ● Media ● Springwater residents	Messaging must support the legal test of the Mayor's good faith belief that the by-law was necessary to advance Provincial Priorities (specifically residential housing and servicing). Messaging cannot contradict potential legal positions.
● Reaffirm the benefits of the deal to the public	● Springwater residents ● Media	Increase resident understanding of tangible community benefits, specifically residential

		servicing capacity, potential Seniors' housing/LTC, and the tax protections secured.
● Position Springwater for the next phase (regs, compensation, servicing)	● Minister/MMAH officials ● OPLDF ● City of Barrie leadership ● Simcoe County colleagues	Project constructive, collaborative leadership to maintain influence with decision-makers and ensure Springwater remains at the table to finalize the residential servicing agreement.
● Frame Mayor Coughlin as a responsible leader working in Springwater's best interests	● Springwater residents ● Media	Reinforce the narrative that the use of Strong Mayor powers was a necessary tool to align with Provincial priorities and secure essential housing infrastructure for the community.
● Minimize long-term reputational damage from the strong mayor controversy	● Springwater residents ● Provincial decision-makers	Shift focus from process to outcomes; contextualize the decision as a difficult but responsible judgment necessary to deliver residential housing and servicing.
● Keep political oxygen away from the opposition's narrative	● Council Meetings ● Springwater residents ● Media	Reduce escalation, avoid creating new flashpoints, and prevent amplification of conflicts. Focus on the future implementation.

Facts and Core Messaging

Overarching Frame

Springwater is moving into a new phase that provides long-term certainty for our community.

The Province has made its decision on the boundary, and our responsibility now is to ensure Springwater benefits by securing residential servicing, financial stability, and coordinated growth that reflects our community's needs.

Our focus is on working constructively with the Province and Barrie, meeting our regional obligations, and delivering the best possible outcome for Springwater's future.

Pillar 1: Alignment with Provincial Priorities (Good Faith & Strong Mayor)

Key Idea: The boundary adjustment is a Provincial housing and growth decision. The Mayor acted responsibly to bring forward a by-law that would further these Provincial priorities and protect the Township's interests.

Facts:

- The Province has responsibility for regional growth, housing targets, and boundary decisions.
- Barrie's proposal provides for new homes and employment lands, meeting Provincial growth needs.
- The legislation confirms the Province is proceeding with this approach.
- Springwater's use of powers ensured a by-law was in place to facilitate this alignment with Provincial housing priorities.

Talking Points:

- "When the Province sets regional housing and growth requirements, my responsibility is to ensure we are aligned with that direction to protect Springwater's interests."
- "I used the strong-mayor authority in good faith to bring forward a by-law that furthers Provincial priorities, specifically the creation of residential housing and the infrastructure to support it."
- "The Province has now confirmed it will finalize the boundary. My focus is on ensuring Springwater residents receive the full benefits of the agreement."

Pillar 2: Protecting Springwater's Taxpayers & Services

Key Idea: The goal is not just managing a land transfer, but ensuring Springwater comes out in a stronger financial and service position—specifically regarding servicing—than it would have without an agreement.

Facts:

- The legislation allows the Minister to determine financial arrangements and phase in property taxes.
- The agreement provides a framework for cross-border servicing that would otherwise be unavailable or cost-prohibitive.
- Without an agreement, Springwater risked losing this servicing capacity entirely.

Talking Points:

- "My job is to ensure Springwater is not left worse off—that means securing the residential servicing capacity that is essential for our community's future."
- "The Province has given itself tools to structure compensation. I will be at the table to ensure Springwater's financial interests are protected."
- "This is about responsible planning: we are securing a better position for our residents by guaranteeing the infrastructure they need."

Pillar 3: Concrete Community Benefits (Residential Focus)

Key Idea: Shift the conversation from abstract boundary lines to the real, concrete benefits Springwater residents can see, use, and understand—specifically housing and care.

Facts:

- Servicing is the key: The agreement secures water and wastewater capacity that enables residential development.
- This capacity supports specific community needs: seniors-oriented housing, potential long-term care, and a high school.
- It avoids the reliance on uncertain or expensive private servicing solutions.

Talking Points:

- "We are moving from uncertain future growth to a clear, serviced plan that supports residential housing, seniors' care, and local access to services."
- "The 'pipes' we have secured are what will allow us to build the housing our seniors need to stay in our community."
- "Our focus is on practical outcomes: ensuring the infrastructure is there to support our residents' homes."

Pillar 4: Transparency, Process & Respect for Dissent

Key Idea: Reinforce that the Mayor respects differing views, followed the required legal process, and is committed to openness and clear communication regarding the ongoing negotiations.

Facts:

- The process followed legal requirements for land and negotiation matters.
- Negotiations are ongoing: The framework is set, but the specific details of the servicing agreement are being finalized.
- Residents will be kept informed as these details regarding their services are confirmed.

Talking Points:

- "Now that the Province has made its decision, we enter a new phase of finalizing the details. My responsibility is to communicate clearly as we secure the servicing for our residents."
- "We are currently negotiating the final terms of the servicing agreement to ensure it meets the specific needs of our residential areas."
- "Different opinions are part of healthy local government. What matters now is moving forward together to deliver the housing and infrastructure our community needs."