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.

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.

“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.”

“Our responsibility now is to secure the best possible outcome for Springwater by completing the agreement with Barrie and ensuring servicing, financial stability, and coordinated growth.”

“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.”

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 is the best interest of Springwater. 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. I am glad that Barrie's mayor has also publicly committed to the 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. It's thanks to that forward looking strategic approach that we are in a strong position to finalize the details of an agreement."

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 avoid the massive financial risk of underwriting a private water treatment plant."

Question: If Barrie decides in five years that they don't have the capacity to service the Springwater side, what legal recourse does the Township have?

> **Answer:** "That's just not how this works. The Provincial government has stepped in with legislation to provide certainty. The Act allows the Minister to regulate these transitional matters and ensure fairness. This will no longer just be an agreement between two Municipalities; it is Provincial law designed to unlock housing, and the Province will ensure the infrastructure follows the housing."

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 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. Council put us at real risk of being left without servicing or compensation. I made a difficult decision to protect the Township's long-term interests. Now that the Province has finalized the boundary, my priority now is ensuring Springwater receives what was negotiated."

Question: "You vetoed the Council's decision to retain Loopstra Nixon and effectively fired them. Are you trying to block a judicial inquiry?"

> **Answer:** "I know people had questions about that decision. I made my decision to avoid unnecessary costs for residents. I made the decision to avoid spending taxpayer dollars on something that could not change the outcome. The Province was introducing Bill 76, and the legal action would not have made any difference. My priority now is ensuring Springwater receives 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. They saw that a local consensus wasn't being reached due to obstruction, and they took 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. But I am very confident in my actions and the Province's actions clearly validate my decision. Frankly, the question is moot. My priority now is ensuring Springwater receives what was negotiated."

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. Very little

direct conversations occurred. 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 build a Long-Term Care facility, a Hospice, and a new High School in Springwater. Without this deal, those projects were effectively dead."

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 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."

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.

Audience & Messaging Matrix:

Relevant Audience(s)	Strategic Objective	Communications Goal
• **Council Meetings** • **Media** • **Springwater residents**	• Align with legal strategy & proceedings	Messaging cannot contradict potential legal positions and cannot undercut the rationale for using strong mayor powers. Messaging must support the legal test is the mayor's good faith belief. Messaging must protect the Township's legal position.
• **Springwater residents** • **Media**	• Reaffirm the benefits of the deal to the public	Increase resident understanding of tangible community benefits and reduce misinformation. Servicing, LTC/health campus, mixed-use development at top of Bayfield, tax and compensation protections, environmental stewardship.
• **Minister/MMAH officials** • **OPLDF** • **City of Barrie leadership** • **Simcoe County colleagues**	• Position Springwater for the next phase (regs, compensation, servicing)	Project constructive, collaborative leadership to maintain influence with decision-makers and ensure Springwater remains at the table.
• **Springwater residents** • **Media**	• Frame Mayor Coughlin as a responsible leader working in Springwater's best interests	Reinforce steady, pragmatic stewardship and depoliticize the narrative around the Mayor's role.
• **Springwater residents** • **Provincial decision-makers**	• Minimize long-term reputational damage from the strong mayor controversy	Shift focus from process to outcomes; contextualize the decision as a difficult but responsible judgment aligned with provincial direction.
• **Council Meetings** • **Springwater residents** • **Media**	• Keep political oxygen away from the opposition's narrative	Reduce escalation, avoid creating new flashpoints, and prevent amplification of conflicts.



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 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 align Springwater with that direction and protect the Township's interests within an unavoidable provincial process.

Facts:

- The Province has responsibility for regional growth, housing targets, and boundary decisions under the Municipal Act and Planning Act.
- Barrie's proposal provides up to 8,000 homes and expanded employment lands – which meets the needs for growth the Province has required of Simcoe county.
- The provincial housing facilitator recommended boundary adjustments as the mechanism to meet regional housing and infrastructure requirements.
- The legislation introduced confirms the Province is proceeding with this approach and is now formalizing it.
- Springwater's earlier actions ensured the Township maintained leverage before the decision was finalized.

Talking Points:

- "When the Province sets regional housing and growth requirements, my responsibility is to protect Springwater's interests within that process."
- "I used the strong-mayor authority in good faith, based on the information available at the time and the need to keep Springwater at the table."
- "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 than it would have without an agreement.

Facts:

- The Province acknowledged potential tax revenue impacts for Springwater and Oro-Medonte and granted regulation-making authority for compensation and tax treatment.
- The legislation allows the Minister to determine financial arrangements between municipalities and to phase in property tax implications.
- Earlier communications from Barrie indicated servicing opportunities and long-term revenue potential tied to serviced development near Bayfield.
- Without an agreement, Springwater risked losing leverage and receiving no servicing or compensation.

Talking Points:

- “My job is to ensure Springwater is not left worse off—that means securing servicing, financial protections, and long-term stability.”
- “The Province has given itself tools to structure compensation and tax treatment. I will be at the table to ensure Springwater is protected.”
- “This is about responsible planning: we are focused on ending up in a stronger position, not simply absorbing the loss.”

Pillar 3: Concrete Community Benefits

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

Facts:

- Servicing would enable development that supports a range of community needs, including mixed-use medical and commercial uses and seniors-oriented housing.
- Planning discussions have included a medical and health-related campus concept near Bayfield, subject to future approvals.
- Environmental protection around Little Lake has been identified as a guiding consideration in any planning process.
- Current rural land without servicing provides limited near-term benefit and uncertain future revenue.

Talking Points:

- “We are moving from uncertain future growth to a clear, serviced plan that supports housing, care, employment, and local access to services.”
- “Servicing creates real benefits that residents can actually use—not just land sitting unserviced for decades.”
- “Our focus is on practical outcomes: coordinated planning, access to services, and protecting key environmental areas.”

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 going forward.

Facts:

- This has been a difficult and divisive issue, and reasonable people can disagree in good faith.
- Council debated the matter repeatedly, received legal opinions with different interpretations, and residents expressed a range of perspectives.
- Discussions followed the legal requirements for land and negotiation matters under Ontario's closed-session rules, and the file ultimately proceeded in public once permitted.

Talking Points:

- "All discussions followed the required municipal process. When it became appropriate and permitted, the matter came before Council in public, and residents were able to see and hear those discussions."
- "Now that the Province has made its decision, my responsibility is to communicate clearly, listen to concerns, and work with Council and staff to ensure Springwater achieves the best possible outcome."
- "Different opinions are part of healthy local government. What matters now is moving forward together and staying focused on what benefits residents."