



ADR
CHAMBERS

Integrity Commissioner Office
for Township of Springwater

BENJAMIN M. DRORY

Integrity Commissioner

bdrory@adr.ca

June 30, 2026

SENT BY EMAIL TO:

Deputy Mayor George Cabral

And to:

Councillor Matt Garwood

And to:

Renée Ainsworth, Acting Chief Administrative Officer/Director of Corporate Services/Acting Clerk – for distribution to all Members of Springwater Township Council

Re: Investigation Report – IC-35900-0326
Council Code of Conduct Complaint Respecting Councillor M. Garwood

This is my report respecting a March 30, 2026 application (the “Complaint”) initiated by Deputy Mayor George Cabral (“Deputy Mayor Cabral”) against Councillor Matt Garwood (“Councillor Garwood”), pursuant to the Township’s *Code of Conduct for Members of Council, Local Boards and Committees*¹ (the “Code of Conduct”).

I initially reviewed the Complaint pursuant to sections 17.3 through 17.5 of the Code of Conduct’s Complaint Protocol, to determine initial jurisdiction, and accepted that it met the threshold to be investigated. On April 7, 2026, pursuant to section 17.7 of the Complaint Protocol, our Office invited Councillor Garwood to provide a written response to the Complaint. Section 17.8 of the Complaint

¹ <https://www.springwater.ca/en/township-hall/resources/Documents/Integrity-Commissioner/2021-025-Code-of-Conduct-Council-Local-Boards-Committees-.pdf>

Protocol entitles me to speak to anyone relevant to a Complaint, which I ultimately did with both parties and with one witness.

The Parties' Positions

Complaint

Deputy Mayor Cabral submitted the following by email on March 30, 2026:

Attached you will find my written complaint outlining a series of communication activities undertaken by Springwater Ward 1 Counsellor (sic) Matt Garwood beginning in early February 2026 and continuing. The submission respectfully requests your review of whether the timing, structure, and access to these communication platforms are consistent with the expectations set out in the Code of Conduct, particularly in advance of the municipal nomination period commencing May 1, 2026. ...

In his formal Complaint letter, Deputy Mayor Cabral submitted:

Purpose of Complaint

This request arises from a series of communication activities which ... may reasonably be perceived as creating an advantage for a Member of Council in advance of the municipal nomination period.

...

These activities include a recurring newspaper column and paid Facebook advertising. While communication with residents is an expected part of a Member's role, the nature of the newspaper column – particularly the apparent provision of recurring publication space of material value and not equally available to all Members – raises concern. ...

Background Overview

During the 2018–2022 term... the then Mayor, Don Allen, maintained a recurring column within the local newspaper. It was later determined that this column space had been provided without cost to the Township, and this ... was not known to Council at the time. The column morphed into something called "Council Connects" with the ... 2022-2026 term.

In response to concerns regarding fairness, transparency, and equitable access to communication platforms, Council subsequently ... debated the “Council Connects” format as a collectively managed approach to newspaper communication.

*On 15 March 2023, Council ... adopted Resolution **C177-2023** ...:*

“... Be it therefore resolved that the Council Connects article be discontinued until other forms of Council engagement can be reviewed and adopted, including digital media and mobile app options”.

This decision followed ongoing concerns regarding ... the use of donated or preferential newspaper space for Council-related communication. ...

The intent of Council’s direction was to discontinue a communication format that provided unequal or uncontrolled access to a publicly distributed platform.

Description of Conduct

(a) Recurring Newspaper Column

Beginning in early February 2026, the Member began publishing a recurring column in the North Simcoe Springwater News. The column has appeared in four consecutive editions to date.

Each column is presented under the heading:

“Community Update from Ward 1 Councillor Matt Garwood”

The content ... includes statements such as:

“Hello Springwater residents. I’m pleased to share updates...”

“Thank you for staying engaged...”

The column discusses Township initiatives, Council-related matters and local events, and includes a photograph of the Member.

The North Simcoe Springwater News is a free bi-weekly publication that has a circulation of approximately 23,000 copies ... throughout Springwater Township and two adjoining municipalities. ...

In at least one instance (March 26, 2026), the column appears directly adjacent to a North Simcoe Springwater News reporter – Brian Belcourt – who’s column reported specifically on recent Council proceedings.

Based on the publication’s advertising rate sheet, the space occupied by the column (approximately one-third page, full colour) represents an estimated value of:

- *\$495 per single insertion, plus HST*
- *\$440 per insertion for four or more editions, plus HST*
- *...*

Based on four insertions to date, the estimated value is approximately \$1,760 plus HST.

It is my understanding that this column space is not made available to other Members of Council.

... [I]t is unclear whether the current arrangement reflects the provision of space at no cost or reduced cost. It is known ... however, that Springwater Township is not paying for the space. ... [T]he Member is receiving recurring access to a high-value communication platform through his own arrangements with North Simcoe Springwater News.

(b) Facebook Sponsored Advertising

During the same period, the Member has also begun use of paid Facebook advertising. These ads are identified as “Sponsored” and include the statement:

“Paid for by Councillor Matt Garwood”

...

... [T]hey represent a paid communication activity occurring during the same time frame as the newspaper column.

Code of Conduct - Potential Breaches.

... The following Code of Conduct sections are identified for ... review:

(a) Improper Use of Office for Personal or Private Advantage (Receipt of Benefit)

The Code of Conduct provides that Members shall not ... use their position to secure or attempt ... any direct or indirect personal or private advantage.

The Member's recurring newspaper column ... represents continued access to publication space with a clear and measurable commercial value. Based on the publication's rate sheet, this space is ... resulting in an estimated total value of approximately \$1,760 plus HST.

It is my understanding that comparable access to this publication space is not available to other Members of Council. ... [I]t is unclear whether the current arrangement reflects full market payment, reduced rates, or the provision of space without cost. ...

Municipal Codes of Conduct generally recognize that the receipt of goods, services, or opportunities of value from third parties – particularly where not equally available to others – may constitute a benefit or advantage.

... [T]he repeated use of such space in a manner tied to the Member's title and position raises the question of whether the influence of office is being used to secure or maintain access to a ... platform not equally available to others.

In either circumstance, the receipt ... combined with paid Facebook advertising ... creates sustained public exposure in advance of the nomination period. ...

(b) Fairness and Equity Among Members

The Code contemplates that Members will act in a manner that is fair and equitable with respect to other Members of Council.

...

Other Members of Council do not appear to have access to comparable space within the same publication.

This creates a disparity in communication reach and visibility among Members.

(c) Respect for Council Decisions

Members are expected to respect and uphold decisions of Council.

Council previously discontinued a newspaper-based communication model ... through Resolution C177-2023.

The current column reflects a similar format, function, and distribution model, but on an individual basis.

... [T]he re-establishment of a similar communication format raises the question of whether the intent of Council's direction is being respected.

...

Requested Review

I would respectfully request the Integrity Commissioner ... consider whether the Member has obtained ... an advantage by gaining access to a communication platform not available to others, and to consider whether the Member's actions are consistent with Council's prior direction ...

Supporting Materials

I have attached ...

- *Copy of Resolution C177-2023 ...*
- *Copies of the four newspaper columns ...*
- *Advertising rate sheet from the North Simcoe Springwater News*
- *Screenshots of Facebook sponsored advertisements*

This request is made ... for the purpose of ensuring clarity, consistency, and fairness in the application of the Code of Conduct.

I reviewed Deputy Mayor Cabral's attachments. The Minutes of the March 15, 2023 Council meeting showed:²

[continued on next page]

² <https://springwater.civicweb.net/document/206181/?printPdf=true>

15.1. Notice of Motion regarding a Request for Council to Set Parameters Around the Council Connects Article in the Springwater News Presented by: Councillor Moore

C177-2023

...

Whereas Springwater Township and community partners regularly report on Council activities and community events in the Springwater News.

Be It Therefore Resolved That the Council Connects article be discontinued until other forms of Council engagement can be reviewed and adopted, including digital media and mobile app options.

Carried

Deputy Mayor Cabral provided screen captures of Councillor Garwood's articles in the North Simcoe Springwater News ("NSSN"),³ that were dated February 12, February 26, March 12, and March 26, 2026. The articles were all titled "Community Update from Ward 1 Councillor Matt Garwood, Township of Springwater" or "Community Update from Ward 1 Councillor Matt Garwood". Their screen captures are pasted in Appendix 1 to this Report.

Deputy Mayor Cabral also attached a screenshot of a March 4, 2026 Facebook post from an account titled 'Councillor Matt Garwood, Ward 1 Township of Springwater Councillor'.⁴ The post began as follows, and its balance is pasted in Appendix 2 to this Report.

Ward 1 Community Update – February 2026

This month, I'm launching a new initiative to keep you better informed about Council's key discussions and decisions. Each month, I will share a brief summary highlighting items that directly affect our community. You can also find regular updates in my North Simcoe Springwater News column. ...

³ Evidence in this case establishes that the publication now known as the North Simcoe Springwater News was previously known simply as the 'Springwater News' while run by its previous Owner/Publisher. The two names are used interchangeably in this Report, since they reflect the same corporation.

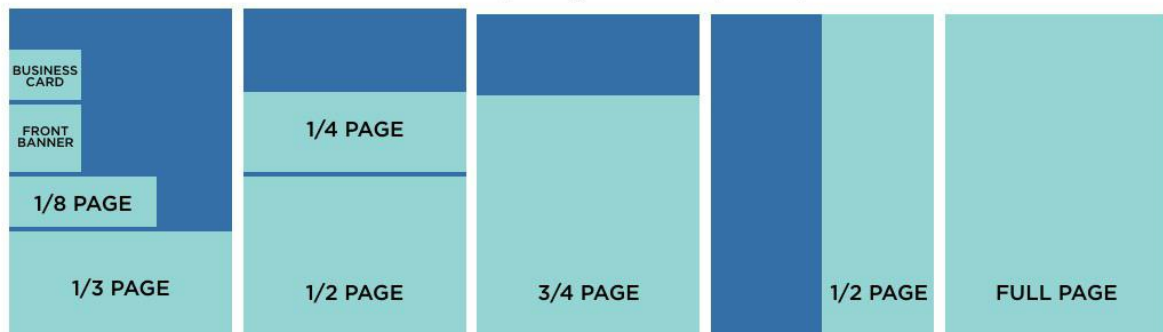
⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/electgarwood>

Deputy Mayor Cabral also provided screen captures of Facebook advertising from Councillor Garwood, which are reflected in Appendix 3 to this Report – but which I do not consider particularly relevant to analyzing this case, since advertising is permitted within defined rules that there is no evidence were breached.

Finally, Deputy Mayor Cabral provided the following image outlining the cost to advertise in NSSN:⁵

Print Ad Size		One Edition	4 or More Editions	13 or More Editions
Full Page	9.5" w x 13.75" h	\$1,500	\$1,380	\$1,300
¾ Page	9.5" w x 7.75" h	\$1,180	\$1,050	\$1,000
½ Page	9.5" w x 6.88 h 4.7" w x 13.75" h	\$790	\$715	\$670
⅓ Page	9.5" w x 4.6" h	\$495	\$440	\$420
¼ Page	9.5" w x 3.4" h	\$395	\$360	\$330
8th Page	6.28" w x 2.15" h	\$200	\$180	\$170
Business Card	3.06" w x 2.15" h	\$65	\$60	\$60
Front Banner	3.06" w x 2.86" h	\$150	\$150	\$150

Custom sizes / pricing available upon request



Call: 705-790-1993 / email: info@springwaternews.ca / www.springwaternews.ca

RESPONSE

Councillor Garwood submitted his formal Response on April 16, 2026:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide clarification on this matter.

As an elected official, I take seriously my responsibility to represent residents and to

⁵ I was able to match this up to the following information online:

<https://www.springwaternews.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-Rate-Sheet-NS-Springwater-News-April-2025.pdf>

communicate openly about issues affecting our community. ... Fulfilling that responsibility necessarily requires ongoing and transparent communication with the individuals we serve.

The Municipal Act, 2001 does not restrict members of council from communicating with residents, promoting their work, or maintaining a visible presence within the community, provided municipal resources are not used inappropriately. It is both customary and encouraged for councillors to share information, provide updates, and engage with constituents through a variety of channels, including personal websites, newsletters, social media, and local publications.

Since being elected in 2022, I have made accessibility and transparency central to my approach... I have consistently worked to keep residents informed about local matters. These efforts reflect ... the standards set out in Section 15 of the Township of Springwater Code of Conduct respecting social media. That section directs members to identify themselves appropriately as elected officials, to act respectfully, and to refrain from dishonest or misleading content. At all times, I have complied fully.

Before launching my regular column in the North Simcoe Springwater News ... I proactively sought and received confirmation from the Township of Springwater Clerk's Department that my communication approach was fully compliant with the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Township's Code of Conduct. I have continued to adhere closely to that guidance ...

Since the beginning of this term, I have been active both online and in print, prioritizing transparency and consistent communication ... Through my public social media platform ... I have built a following of nearly 700 residents and community members. Over ... more than 1,400 posts, I have shared timely community updates, local event details, and information on Township matters that directly affect Springwater residents. Long before establishing my regular column... I frequently submitted articles for publication on community issues, events, and initiatives, often in connection with my work as a Council member.

... [A]ny member of Council is welcome to submit informational content to local media outlets, just like any other resident. In fact, following the start of my column, another member of Council approached the editor about doing something similar and was advised that submissions from any member would be welcomed, provided they focused on non-opinion content intended to inform the community outside of campaign periods. Despite this ... four members, including the complainant, have

consistently voted against utilizing local media such as the North Simcoe Springwater News for Township communication purposes ... please see this article.⁶

I regret that concerns were raised through a formal complaint rather than through direct discussion. ... I would have welcomed the opportunity to address any questions or misunderstandings personally and constructively. I make myself available to both colleagues and residents and encourage open dialogue wherever possible.

The information I have shared with residents has been factual, non-partisan, and focused on matters of local relevance, particularly those affecting Ward 1. These communications have incurred no cost to the taxpayer. ... [I]ndividual members retain the right to communicate with constituents through external channels ... provided all rules and ethical standards are upheld. ...

To be clear, this is not an election period, and therefore the rules governing campaign-related communications do not apply. I am fully aware of those distinctions and continue to ensure that all public updates conform ...

... I remain committed to providing accurate, respectful, and relevant information to the community, as I believe this is fundamental to effective local governance.

I would like to kindly direct you to the Township of Springwater ... Council Remuneration and Expense Policy⁷ ... Included ... is a discretionary budget allocated to members of Springwater Township Council on an annual basis. These funds are intended to assist Members in:

- ...
- *conducting meetings and communicating with constituents and stakeholders; and*
- *maintaining meaningful connections with residents through local events and activities*

⁶ “‘Priceless’ communication in Springwater comes with price” (Wayne Doyle, Barrie Today, December 2, 2023) – see Appendix 4
https://www.barrietoday.com/local-news/priceless-communication-in-springwater-comes-with-price-7910701#google_vignette

⁷ Council Remuneration and Expense Policy (September 7, 2022)
<https://springwater.civicweb.net/FileStorage/6E2C9A9C1EFE43E4A9AC01CABBCBA136-A09-COU%20Council%20Remuneration%20and%20Expense%20Policy%20-%20.pdf>

... I have never drawn from those funds for community communication. All communication related costs have been personally covered by me. This was an intentional choice, made in anticipation that any use of such funds could later be mischaracterized or politicized ...

...

Context is also important. For more than three years, I have worked to seek compromise and engage my Council colleagues with respect, recognizing that a difference in perspective does not make someone an adversary. ...

Somewhere along the way, we have seen a troubling shift away from respectful, fact-based debate toward personal attacks, misinformation, and empty theatrics. This approach serves no one. It erodes public trust, and residents are right to feel frustrated and let down by such conduct.

I have repeatedly encouraged my Council colleagues to set aside personal grievances and commit to the real work of governing ...

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further ...

The article Councillor Garwood referenced is pasted in Appendix 4 to this Report.⁸ Excerpts from the Council Remuneration and Expense Policy Councillor Garwood referenced are pasted in Appendix 5 to this Report.⁹

REPLY

Deputy Mayor Cabral provided his Reply on April 24, 2026:

... The Respondent begins by ... suggesting that communicating with residents is both authorized and expected. On this general point, there is no disagreement. ... What the ... Respondent's submission does not address ... is the receipt of a private benefit in the course of that communication. The Municipal Act ... does not authorize a councillor to accept from a private corporation recurring advertising space of measurable commercial value, exclusive in nature, and connected to the performance of official duties. Section 10 of the Code of Conduct operates

⁸ Note 6, *supra*

⁹ Note 8, *supra*

independently ...

... [O]n ... Section 10, the Respondent's submission is silent. ... Section 10.1 of the Code prohibits a Member from accepting "a gift or personal benefit that is connected directly or indirectly with the performance of their duties" unless an enumerated exception applies. A free newspaper column valued at approximately \$440 per insertion ... using his official title, featuring his photograph ... falls squarely within the Code's definition of a "gift" or "personal benefit." The Respondent does not identify which exception under Section 10.2 he relies upon. ... He simply does not engage with the provision at all.

... [T]he core breach alleged ... remains entirely unaddressed by the Respondent.

... The Respondent does not specify what information was disclosed to the Clerk ... The very act of seeking pre-approval suggests the Respondent recognized that the column arrangement raised questions of propriety. ... Yet ... he did not approach the Integrity Commissioner – the independent officer specifically appointed ... to provide Members with advice respecting their obligations under ... policies governing ethical behaviour. ... The Clerk, however diligent, does not have the statutory mandate to provide binding interpretation of the Code's gift and benefit provisions. ...

...

The Respondent has not demonstrated that the specific arrangement he enjoys ... is available to all Members on the same terms. ...

... The test under Section 10.1 is whether the Member received a benefit, not whether the public incurred a cost. ...

The Respondent correctly notes that this is not an election period ... The pre-nomination timing was referenced ... as relevant ... for assessing the advantage created ... during the months immediately preceding the May 1, 2026 nomination date. The Code's gift and benefit provisions exist to prevent the accumulation of unearned advantages through the use of office at any time ...

...

... [T]he Respondent does pay personally for Facebook sponsored advertisements. He does not pay for the newspaper column. Both are paid promotional activities.

Both use his official title. ... The only material distinction ... is that the Facebook ads are transparently labeled as paid promotions, while the newspaper column's financial arrangement remains undisclosed. ...

... [T]he Respondent has declined to use the \$1,000 ward budget—an equitable, transparent, and accountable mechanism available to every Member of Council ... while simultaneously accepting from a private media corporation advertising space ...

... The concerns raised ... are not personal in nature. They relate to the equitable application of the Code of Conduct ... respect for a collective Council decision, and the integrity of the gift and benefit framework. These are systemic governance questions that individual discussion between Members cannot resolve. ... [I]t is the mechanism the Code itself establishes for circumstances precisely such as these.

Finally ... Council collectively decided to discontinue the "Council Connects" newspaper column through Resolution C177-2023. The Respondent ... has now established a personal column in the same publication, in the same format, reaching the same audience. This is not compliance with Council's direction. It is an individual circumvention of a collective decision. ...

CODE OF CONDUCT PROVISIONS

The Code of Conduct provisions raised in this Complaint read:

3. Definitions

3.1. In this Code ...

...

"Gift" means cash, fees, admission fees, advances, vouchers, invitations, objects of value, services, offers, personal benefits, travel and accommodation or entertainment that are provided to and retained by a Member, that could be seen to be connected directly or indirectly to the performance of the Member's duties.

...

[continued on next page]

8. Undue Use of Influence

8.1. No Member shall use their status as a Member of Council to improperly influence the actions or decisions of ... others to the private advantage of the Member or his or her family, employees or business associates.

...

10. Gifts

10.1. No Member shall accept a gift or personal benefit that is connected ... with the performance of their duties unless authorized by one of the exceptions below.

10.2. ... [T]he following exceptions are applicable:

- a) gifts received as an incident of protocol or social obligation that normally accompany the responsibilities of elected office;*
- b) gifts that are not connected ... with the performance or duties of office;*
- c) compensation authorized by law;*
- d) a reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred in ... activities connected with a legitimate municipal purpose;*
- e) political contributions ... offered, accepted and reported in accordance with applicable law;*
- f) services provided without compensation by persons volunteering their time;*
- g) a suitable memento of a function with nominal value, honouring the Member or the Township;*
- h) food, lodging, transportation and entertainment provided by provincial, regional and local governments or political sub-divisions ... and by the federal government or the government of a foreign country; and,*
- i) food, beverages and/or admission fees provided by banquets, receptions or similar events if attendance is the result of protocol or social obligation consistent with the responsibilities of office, and the person extending the invitation has done so infrequently and that person or a representative of the organization is in attendance.*

...

[continued on next page]

14. Encouragement of Respect for the Township and By-laws

14.1. A Member shall:

- a) encourage the public ... and their colleagues to abide by the Township's by-laws and policies, including this Code; and,*
- b) accurately communicate the decisions of Council even if they disagree with the majority decision ... and by so doing affirm the respect and integrity in the decision-making processes of Council.*

15. Social Media

15.1. A Member shall:

- ...
- b) always identify themselves without any attempt to cover, disguise or mislead as to their ... status as an elected representative of the Township when using social media.*

...

INVESTIGATION

March 15, 2023 Council discussion re: Council Connects

I watched the video of the March 15, 2023 Council discussion regarding the "Council Connects" article,¹⁰ which Council decided to discontinue. Councillor Moore opined that recent articles were repetitive with little value-added, so she wished for Council to communicate via other means like digital media and mobile apps. Councillor Garwood disagreed because he believed it was important for residents to hear from their Council, and removing Council Connects would remove such an option that he knew residents appreciated. Councillor Fisher said nobody in the Township appreciated redundancy. Deputy Mayor Cabral felt liberties had been taken with Council Connects, which didn't necessarily reflect the voice of councillors, but rather material from Springwater News staff on their behalf.

Then-CAO Jeff Schmidt said the Township's Communications Coordinator created Council Connects by consolidating information from individual Members of Council, which the Mayor then reviewed and submitted for Springwater News'

¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVj9_im7UTM, from (2:09:55) to (2:42:33)

consideration. Mayor Coughlin said Council Connects had been intended to eliminate redundancies – there was previously a Mayor’s Message and individual Members with the same message – so the intention was for Council to come together in one space. She agreed that Council Connects was creating more issues than it was solving, partly from her having to approve it, and she didn’t mean to censor anybody – so she was happy to return to the Mayor’s Message and receive contributions from Members of Council. Councillor Garwood felt they were “really just changing the name of the article”, which Mayor Coughlin didn’t disagree with.¹¹ Councillor Moore stated “there is nothing prohibiting a councillor from putting something in the newspaper. That is your right, that is your freedom,”¹² but it wasn’t transparent for either the Mayor’s Message or Council Connects to be at no cost to the Township, so she wished to see it discontinued.

Deputy Mayor Cabral said¹³ if he wished to write in the Springwater News he could write a letter to the editor or reach into his own pocket. Councillor Fisher felt the Springwater News arrangement was toxic, because things had been said about election candidates that shouldn’t have been while being paid for by the Township – to which Mayor Coughlin replied the Township wasn’t being invoiced for the space. Deputy Mayor Cabral opined the Township shouldn’t be accepting free space under any circumstances – if a Member of Council wanted to say something there, it should be done through paid advertising in the ‘Springwater Link’ or another avenue that the Township pays for. Councillor Fisher agreed, and felt that the Township’s relationship with the Springwater News put it in a cumbersome position.

Follow-up Information from Councillor Garwood

I asked Councillor Garwood for some follow-up information. He described some correspondence he had with the Springwater News’ editor, and wrote:

... [T]his column is strictly factual and non-opinion in nature. It typically provides summaries of community events and Council-approved matters from the preceding weeks.... I have contributed information to the Springwater News on at least 22 occasions over the past two to three years. My involvement ... predates this term of Council and has been a consistent part of my role ... I am also aware of repeated claims that this type of column is not available to other members of Council. This is

¹¹ At (2:25:29)

¹² At (2:25:54)

¹³ At (2:29:40)

not accurate. I have been advised directly by the editor, Mr. Brian Belcourt, that at least two other members of Council have inquired about similar opportunities, and that he would welcome contributions from any member of Council interested in keeping the community informed. ... I do not believe it is appropriate that I be scrutinized by the complainant for taking the initiative to fulfill my role by keeping the community informed of Council-approved decisions, policies, and local events.

Councillor Garwood forwarded me some email correspondence he had with the Springwater News:

From: Matt Garwood
To: Info (Springwater News)
Sent: January 29, 2026, 7:35 am

Good morning Kari and Brian,

...

I also wanted to ask whether you might be interested in me contributing a monthly column. ... I would be happy to focus on local Elmvale events and Springwater council matters.

Just a thought, no pressure at all.

Enjoy the rest of your day.

From: Info (Springwater News)
Sent: February 2, 2026, 10:39 am

Morning Matt,

... We would be interested in a monthly column. If you could call Brian ... to discuss.

Warm Regards,

Kari Belcourt

From: Matt Garwood

Sent: February 4, 2026, 12:44 pm

Hi Kari,

... I spoke with Brian today, and I would be happy to contribute to the paper.

Do you have space in next weeks paper? If so, I will send you a column to be included. The column will not be opinion based, but instead an update for the community on what's happening in Springwater. ...

From: Info (Springwater News)

Sent: February 4, 2026, 1:37 pm

Hello Matt,

Yes, I do have space in the next edition. If you could kindly send before Monday February 9th. I plan to put you into the politics section of the paper with Doug Downey¹⁴ and Doug Shipley¹⁵ as Jill Dunlop¹⁶ only does monthly contributions as well. ... If on other editions I run out of space in the politics section, I will put you in the Springwater section.

We greatly appreciate your support and contribution to the paper.

Warm Regards,

Kari Belcourt

Councillor Garwood emailed me again the next day:

... [F]ollowing the Township of Springwater Town Hall on March 25, Mr. Brian Belcourt advised me that two other members had expressed interest in contributing. He indicated that submissions would be welcomed... provided they are not opinion-based and are intended to keep the community informed (e.g., community updates). The North Simcoe Springwater News has also advised that while I am welcome to submit an column for each edition, publication is subject to space availability. If

¹⁴ Member of Provincial Parliament – Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte

¹⁵ Member of Parliament – Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte

¹⁶ Member of Provincial Parliament – Simcoe North

another member submits content, my column may not be included in that edition. I agreed to these terms and have no concerns. In fact, I encouraged broader participation and hope that all seven members will use the paper as a way to keep the community informed. Additionally, prior to Council ending its formal partnership with the North Simcoe Springwater News, the paper regularly featured a full page dedicated to Council activities and updates. Members of Council were able to submit content at no charge. ...

...

... [T]he paper regularly publishes a wide range of columns from community groups, organizations, clubs, and individuals. Some are opinion-based, while others are informational. In my view, this model supports community engagement, particularly for residents who may not be active online. ... Finally, the paper has historically accepted numerous submissions from members of the public at no charge, including several from me over the years. These have covered municipal matters, community events, celebrations, and milestones. ...

Later that afternoon, Councillor Garwood forwarded me the following correspondence from the Springwater News:

From: Info (Springwater News)

Sent: April 28, 2026, 2:23 pm

Good afternoon Matt,

We are pleased to offer all current members of Springwater Council the opportunity to submit a brief, community-focused informational article for publication, space permitting.

Submissions must be strictly factual, non-opinion-based, and focused solely on municipal matters, community updates, and local events. This content will be presented as part of a public information column intended to keep residents informed on municipal activities.

There is no cost associated with these submissions, and they will be treated as informational content rather than advertising.

Please note that any paid advertising by members of Council or affiliated services during the election period must be arranged separately and clearly identified as

advertising. This ensures compliance with the Municipal Elections Act, including requirements around transparency and the separation of editorial content from paid political messaging.

Currently, no Springwater Township members or services are advertising with our publication.

Should you have any questions or require clarification, please feel free to reach out.

Warm Regards,

Kari Belcourt

Councillor Garwood opined:

While I am no expert, I do not believe a bi-weekly newspaper column should ever be considered a "gift" under the Code of Conduct. I am not the first person on Council ... to use the paper to communicate with constituents.

... Even if construed as a personal benefit, the column qualifies under exception 10.2(b) as something "not connected directly or indirectly with the performance of duties of office." This aligns with precedent, as former Mayor Don Allen maintained a regular column in the Springwater News for years, along with his predecessors, without issue.

A regular column is a professional or journalistic arrangement for public communication, rather than a retained item of personal value. ...

INTERVIEWS

Councillor Garwood

I spoke with both parties to the case, first with Councillor Garwood. He said NSSN has changed hands three times over the past few decades, but he's had some sort of involvement with each owner, including submitting articles about community events before his time on Council. He said most of the current Members of Council used NSSN for advertising during the 2022 campaign, and he's consistently shared communication with them since then, being published over 20 times. However, he said his arrangement with NSSN is very casual – there's no written agreement beyond that they'd gladly accept communication from all Members of Council, as they have done for many years at no charge, on

the understanding those articles must relate to community and non-partisan matters, not to self-promotion or an election. He said the community is rural with relatively older residents, so NSSN is important for keeping residents apprised about what's happening, and it has remained strong despite many competitors going defunct.

Councillor Garwood said NSSN's former owner/editor (Linda Belcourt) had asked him and the Mayor to put consistent articles in the paper for a long time, and after her passing the idea came up again in a conversation with the new owners. He said they were happy to accept information from him within strict guidelines – i.e., it had to be not-opinion-based, about Council-approved matters or community events open to the public, and NSSN would have final revisions over any materials he shared. He added that the opportunity was also open to any other Member of Council that wished.

Councillor Garwood didn't know NSSN's formal status (i.e., for-profit versus non-profit), but said he assumed they were for-profit since people advertise there – probably about 80% of NSSN comprised of local community stories or information. He said Springwater News previously gave Township Members of Council free space for decades through Council Connects – Members could submit information through the Township's communications staff for publication at no charge, but hand-in-hand with the Township also paying for advertising – such as information about things like tax bill deadlines. He said Council chose to cease Council Connects, which he opposed since it carried no cost to taxpayers, and also subsequently eliminated the advertisements.

Councillor Garwood said he subsequently asked the Clerk's Office what the decision meant regarding whether individual Members of Council could still utilize NSSN, and they told him Council's resolution was directed towards staff – i.e., to stop sending NSSN information from the Township – but he could do so as an individual councillor, as part of any separate arrangement with NSSN. Councillor Garwood asserted that his submissions to NSSN were nothing new, although he had increased the frequency recently.

I asked Councillor Garwood what he recalled about the March 2023 Council Connects decision, to which he replied he thought it was “absolutely ridiculous”. He said he's been very vocal about communications generally, which he felt should be left to the Township's professional communications staff, not individual Members of Council saying they like one publication or another. He said staff

consistently reminded Members of Council about the space, but it was often only him and the Mayor submitting anything – and Deputy Mayor Cabral particularly never took advantage of the opportunity over five or six years.

Councillor Garwood said after the public Town Hall of March 25, 2025, NSSN's current editor, Brian Belcourt, welcomed any Member of Council to submit articles so long as they followed the same guidelines he was told about. He said Brian Belcourt (the spouse of Linda Belcourt) is the newspaper's current owner; Kari Belcourt is their daughter, and Brian and Kari have taken on running the newspaper. Councillor Garwood said Mr. Belcourt told him NSSN might not have space for his recent article since two other Members of Council had inquired that night about submitting something similar – which Councillor Garwood said he was generally happy to hear. He said they have all had the same opportunity, and it's their prerogative to partake or not, but he shouldn't be penalized for taking the initiative to communicate with residents.

Councillor Garwood didn't consider NSSN's publication of his articles to be a gift. He acknowledged that the Clerks' Office isn't the Integrity Commissioner's Office, but he often references the Clerk's Office's experience with the Code and the *Municipal Act*, and only asked for clarification in this case about the "performance of duties" part in section 10.2. He said he'd perceive the situation differently if he was promoting himself in NSSN and then asking Council to spend money on them, but none of his articles spoke about anything he personally did – they are all about Council decisions as a body and community events, and none have referenced him by name (other than the fact he wrote the article).

Councillor Garwood said when he does advertise in NSSN – for example, a holiday message every Christmas – he pays the market rate, and he advertised heavily during the 2022 election and paid the same rate as anybody else did, which he'll do again. Accordingly, he felt his relationship with NSSN was no different from anybody else submitting something to them. He added that he sits on many community boards that also submit information to NSSN, which they accept because they don't have significant resources and like to take submissions to fill their paper with information that will be helpful to readers.

Councillor Garwood wondered hypothetically where Deputy Mayor Cabral's stance would stop – for example, whether it would be an unfair advantage to him if a journalist asked for a quote (which has happened dozens of times), or if a radio

host asked him about Council matters. He felt those were part of his core duty to keep his community informed, and he is known in the community for accessibility and constantly communicating, and people seem thankful for his social media presence.

Finally, Councillor Garwood added that Deputy Mayor Cabral formerly held his role (Ward 1 Councillor), and seemed clearly worried about NSSN now despite having led the charge to remove communications from them. He said he and Deputy Mayor Cabral have a strained relationship – they have very different visions for the community, and he believed this complaint was political and directly tied to the upcoming election season, which he thought wasted resources. He said he consistently over-inquires with the Clerk’s Office because the rest of Council “has had knives out” for him since the beginning, so he asks about everything for this exact reason – i.e., to ensure he was diligently following the rules, and the Clerk’s Office had assured him many times that his actions followed the Code’s rules. He added that Members of Council receive annual budgets, but he didn’t believe the rest of them would even know what to do with a communications budget – Council has weaponized so many aspects of the job that he won’t put himself in a position where they can launch an internal inquiry about why he’s spent taxpayer money inappropriately. He said he still continues communicating, though, and donates and advertises at his own cost given that background.

Deputy Mayor Cabral

I spoke with Deputy Mayor Cabral, and began by asking how he understood the political advertising rules applied prior to a formal municipal election period. He replied that the *Elections Act* doesn’t apply during that period, but it was still interesting how Councillor Garwood’s actions correlated with the upcoming election, and presented an opportunity for self-branding and promotion that could certainly carry over into the election period – so if the behaviour had been ongoing for months he’d have probably complained earlier.

Deputy Mayor Cabral said he was formerly a ward councillor during the 2018-22 term, during which Mayor Allen had a column in the Springwater News that he was unaware wasn’t authorized or paid for by the Township. He said in 2018-22 there was another publication (the Barrie Advance), and the Township’s

Communications Officer initiated more than one review of their communications policy, which included where to direct the Township's "advertising money", and it was a toss-up between those two publications. He said he was among four Members of Council that voted to maintain Springwater News as the preference, because they had the widest distribution in the Township among print media. However, during the 2022 review it was noted that the Barrie Advance offered significant savings, although both publications had distribution problems – not everybody in the Township could access them. There was another option that other municipalities were using (a "direct mailer"), which he said cost more but was still a very economical vehicle because the Township could publish it when they wanted and format it as they wanted, for nearly the same price per page – so a majority of Council supported that option, which unfortunately set off some retribution from Springwater News towards certain Members of Council, although he thought the direct mailer has been very successful. He elaborated that a direct mailer is distributed to all Township residents through Canada Post, whenever the Township wishes to publish rather than needing to follow external timelines. He said the March 2023 discussion was about Council Connects not really representing Council as a whole, since Mayor Allen's space had been provided for free, which he hadn't known. He stated that 'Springwater Link' was formerly the title of the information in NSSN, which has now become the direct mailer. He added his opinion that NSSN has been substantially biased against some Members of Council because of how they voted regarding the direct mailer, and that NSSN would be used to discredit certain Members of Council, which was a shame since they used to be good friends.

I asked Deputy Mayor Cabral to elaborate on his assertion that access to publication in NSSN isn't available to other Members of Council. He said there's been no regular column, but people have sent in Letters to the Editor and information in the past which haven't been printed. He suspected that if every Member of Council wanted to write a column in NSSN they'd be refused.

Deputy Mayor Cabral said the issue is Councillor Garwood regularly gets free print space unavailable to other Members of Council, and he disputed that any other Member of Council could simply publish something there because it'd be left to NSSN's subjective determination. He disagreed with Councillor Garwood's assertion that he should have reached out to him personally, since Councillor Garwood doesn't generally come talk to him about his issues, and the Code of

Conduct is the process for bringing contraventions to account. He said Councillor Garwood never addressed his financial benefit from not having to pay for NSSN articles, so it seemed it was easier for Councillor Garwood to ask for forgiveness than for permission in the first place. He said Councillor Garwood does good work in ward 1, but that doesn't mean he can draw outside the lines when he wants.

Kari Belcourt

I spoke with Kari Belcourt, NSSN's Editor.¹⁷ She said Councillor Garwood's contribution to NSSN is a community information column, which the Owner-Publisher (her father, Brian Belcourt) verbally offered all Members of Council at the March 18, 2026 Township Council meeting. She repeatedly referenced the email she previously sent Councillor Garwood on April 28, 2026, for which I reiterate excerpts below:

... We are pleased to offer all current members of Springwater Council the opportunity to submit a brief, community-focused informational article for publication, space permitting.

Submissions must be strictly factual, non-opinion-based, and focused solely on municipal matters, community updates, and local events. This content will be presented as part of a public information column intended to keep residents informed on municipal activities. There is no cost associated with these submissions, and they will be treated as informational content rather than advertising.

Please note that any paid advertising by members of Council or affiliated services during the election period must be arranged separately and clearly identified as advertising. ... Currently, no Springwater Township members or services are advertising with our publication.

Ms. Belcourt said no councillor got back to NSSN's offer besides Councillor Garwood, and confirmed he hasn't been charged for his contributions to the paper, which she said purely public information for Ward 1 residents – for example,

¹⁷ <https://www.springwaternews.ca/>

improvements to structures and local events. She said the articles benefit residents more than NSSN, since they're a for-profit publication.

I asked if Ms. Belcourt had any opinion about the March 2023 Council decision to discontinue Council Connects. She replied that she wasn't the owner then, so she had no personal opinion about it nor any bias or relation to it. She said she's only been covering Council for a couple of months, and has no political influence or personal relationship with any of its Members. She reiterated that if Members of Council wanted to submit informational articles about factual events or community updates, then NSSN would be happy to print them at no cost, space permitting, and NSSN didn't consider it advertising. She said all Members of Council have that opportunity, and if multiple Members submitted items simultaneously then they might have to develop a schedule for publishing them – but only Councillor Garwood has submitted any information.

Finally, I asked if Ms. Belcourt felt NSSN's provision of space to Councillor Garwood constituted a gift. She replied "no, it's not a gift" – she'd characterize it as public notice, like public notices they publish from hospitals, which are to let residents know what's happening in their community, and are separate from any paid political messaging. She added that any journalism in NSSN is separately organized and invoiced, and none of it comes from any politician; to be a gift it'd be considered sponsorship, and would be invoiced as such. She said NSSN hasn't invoiced any Member of Council, and Councillor Garwood's information creates no profit for NSSN – it's just public information. She concluded that the discussion left her concerned for freedom of press during the election, because NSSN was hoping to hold an all-candidates meeting and cover the proceedings.

ANALYSIS

I don't believe Councillor Garwood's recurring article in the NSSN fits the definition of "gift" in the Township's Code of Conduct, and accordingly it doesn't contravene section 10 of the Code of Conduct.

Neither of the parties directly involved consider NSSN's provision of space a gift to Councillor Garwood, and NSSN argued that it is simply the provision of public information. While not determinative, I accept that perspective. This was not a one-sided transaction only creating value for Councillor Garwood, and no evidence suggested that it was granted intending to potentially influence decisions by Councillor Garwood. I believe the relationship creates some benefit for both

sides – a degree of publicity for Councillor Garwood, and a source of recurring content for NSSN – any newspaper requires reliable sources of ongoing content, failing which there would be insufficient information to publish. I accept NSSN's word at face value that they have offered the opportunity to all Members of Council, notwithstanding that Councillor Garwood has seemingly been the only Member of Council to do so. The fact that all other Members of Council have passed on this "opportunity" arguably also calls into question the magnitude of the benefit that Councillor Garwood ostensibly receives from this arrangement.

A "gift" is defined in the Code of Conduct as:

"Gift" means cash, fees, admission fees, advances, vouchers, invitations, objects of value, services, offers, personal benefits, travel and accommodation or entertainment that are provided to and retained by a Member, that could be seen to be connected directly or indirectly to the performance of the Member's duties.

It is difficult to attribute any of the listed descriptions to the publication of Councillor Garwood's columns. I do not consider them "objects of value", which I am more inclined to interpret as akin to physical objects the recipient could keep.

Some other municipal Codes of Conduct have gone further in their wording, to describe the background rationale behind the gift provisions.¹⁸ For example, the Town of Wasaga Beach's gift provision¹⁹ includes the following in its commentary: (emphasis mine)

Commentary

Gifts and benefits are often received by elected officials in the course of their duties ... Business-related ... gift-giving can be a token of respect and admiration for the elected official, but can also be seen as an instrument of influence and manipulation. The object ... is to provide transparency ... and to establish a threshold where the total value could be perceived as potentially influencing a decision.

... Personal integrity and sound business practices require that relationships with ... contractors or others doing business with the Town be such that no Member of

¹⁸ Ontario Regulation 55/18 ("Codes of Conduct – Prescribed Subject Matters") mandates that "gifts and benefits" are only of only four subject matters that must, by law, be part of every municipal Code of Conduct. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/180055>

¹⁹ <https://events.wasagabeach.com/en/town-and-government/resources/By-laws-and-Policies/Code-of-Conduct-By-law-Consolidated-February-2019.pdf>

Council is perceived as showing favoritism or bias toward the giver. There will never be a perfect solution.

The City of Toronto's gifts provision includes the following:

On receiving a disclosure statement, the Integrity Commissioner shall ... ascertain whether the receipt of the gift or benefit might, in her or his opinion, create a conflict between a private interest and the public duty of the member. ...

This case established no conflict between any of Councillor Garwood's private interests versus his public duties. I consider it relevant that writing the articles also requires explicit work on Councillor Garwood's part – NSSN doesn't simply give him the space, he has to first provide them some information that is of value to them; and even then, I accept that NSSN might still not publish his articles if they have a significant volume of articles available from comparable sources.

I tend to agree with the argument Councillor Garwood advanced rhetorically – i.e., whether it would become inappropriate for Members of Council to provide quotes to newspapers or radio hosts if this complaint were to be accepted, given that the creation of any publicity could arguably create a benefit or advantage to the Member. That clearly could not be a reasonable interpretation, though. In my view, the mere creation of a benefit is insufficient to characterize a conveyance of a gift – something more is necessary, since I believe anybody involved in any mutually agreeable conveyance only agrees to such because they believe there is some advantage to them in doing so – otherwise they would decline the exchange. A distinguishing factor in a gift is the lack of any apparent value going in the other direction. The creation of value for NSSN through Councillor Garwood's work is significant in this case. The motivations behind one-way conveyances are also frequently relevant in this context and cannot be of kinds that visibly create suspicion that they were granted to try to influence a Member of Council's decision-making on municipal matters. No such factor was present in this case, though.

I characterize the relationship between Councillor Garwood and NSSN as a mutually beneficial voluntary exchange, but which necessitates effort from both sides. It is not the provision of a "gift". I am satisfied that any other Member of Council can likely obtain the same benefit themselves through creating a community information article in the way that Councillor Garwood does. Providing publicly helpful information is also entirely consistent with Councillor Garwood's public duties as a Member of Council.

I wish to address two other aspects to this case. First, I do not accept that Councillor Garwood's NSSN publications contravene Council's March 15, 2023 decision to discontinue the former Council Connects column. Ample evidence establishes that Council's resolution was a narrow decision to discontinue publishing Council Connects through efforts from Township staff. However, individual Members of Council could still reach out to NSSN to provide information through their own arrangements.

Second, I take no issue with Councillor Garwood's interactions with the Clerk's Office. I acknowledge that the Clerks' Office is not empowered to give binding advice about the application of the Code of Conduct in the way that mine is statutorily appointed to do. However, that doesn't mean that the Clerk's Office might not be deeply knowledgeable about municipal governance generally, on top of being physically present in a way that I am not. I always encourage Members of Council to reach out to my Office for advice, which is the mechanism envisioned under the *Municipal Act, 2001*; but I do not deign to admonish any Member of Council for speaking with the Clerk's Office about anything they might know on point – which in my experience is often considerable.

Decision and Publication

Section 17.10 of the Code of Conduct provides that all investigative Reports my Office completes are to be provided to Council publicly, which is an interpretation the Clerk's Office has confirmed to me informally. That provision reads:

17. Complaint and Investigation Process

...

17.10. Upon conclusion of a complaint investigation, the Integrity Commissioner shall:

a) issue a report to Council on the findings of the investigation and, where there is a finding of contravention of the Code, the report shall contain the detailed findings, any recommended sanctions, or any settlement; and

b) provide a copy of the final report to the Member at the same time as the final report is made available to the Clerk and to the complainant at the same time as the report becomes public.

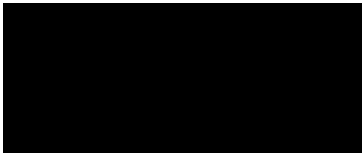
...

17.13. The Integrity Commissioner's report on a complaint shall be placed on an agenda for consideration at a public meeting of the Council, in accordance with the Procedure Bylaw, as determined by the Clerk in consultation with the Integrity Commissioner.

No recommendation is being made to Council in this Report, as I have determined that there was no violation of the Code of Conduct. I thank the parties for their cooperation in this complaint process, and now consider this matter concluded.

Dated at Toronto, this 30th day of June, 2026.

Respectfully submitted by,



Benjamin M. Drory
Integrity Commissioner

APPENDIX 1

Screen captures provided by Deputy Mayor Cabral with his Complaint²⁰

February 12, 2026

 DOUG SHIPLEY MP DOUGSHIPLEYMP.CA	• Any other federal matters How we can help is determined on a case-by-case basis, so the best thing to do is contact my office by telephone or email to discuss your specific	Sincerely, Doug Shipley Member of Parliament Barrie – Springwater – Oro-Medonte
Community Update from Ward 1 Councillor Matt Garwood, Township of Springwater		
Hello Springwater residents. I'm pleased to share updates on recent decisions and developments shaping our community. My goal with these columns is to inform, not to offer opinions, so you can stay connected with what's happening in Springwater. Elmvale Business Improvement Area (BIA): The Elmvale BIA has requested that the Township consider dedicated funding to support a focused economic development plan. This investment would allow the township to advance strategic planning, business retention and attraction, tourism initiatives, marketing efforts, and pursuit of external funding opportunities.	Elmvale Arena – Dehumidification Project: Council has approved the dehumidification project at the Elmvale Arena. This upgrade will improve the building's functionality for residents while protecting it as a valuable public asset. Ensuring safe, healthy, and sustainable recreational spaces continues to be a key priority. Voting Methods – 2026 Municipal Election: Following public consultation, Council voted to explore remote electronic voting options for the upcoming election. Staff have been directed to issue an expedited request for information to vendors who meet rigorous governance, security, and cost standards. A follow-up report will be brought back to Council. Residential Recycling Service Concerns: Since January 1, 2026, residential recycling has been managed by Circular Materials and Emterra Environmental, following the County of Simcoe's service transition. Residents have raised concerns about missed collections and inconsistent service. Council has formally expressed dissatisfaction and called on the Province of Ontario to review oversight and accountability within the new producer responsibility system. Thank you for staying engaged in our community's progress – Matt	
 DOUG DOWNEY 14 - 20 Bell Farm Rd. Barrie, ON L4M 6E4 705-726-5538 doug.downey@pc.ola.org		

²⁰ I note that the insets adjoining these articles for Doug Downey, Doug Shipley, and Karen Jakubos Professional Corporation seem like good examples of paid advertising.

February 26, 2026



Any other federal matters
How we can help is determined on a case-by-case basis, so the best thing to do is contact my

Doug Shipley
Member of Parliament
Barrie – Springwater – Oro-Medonte

Community Update from Ward 1 Councillor Matt Garwood, Township of Springwater

Hello Springwater residents. I'm pleased to share updates on recent decisions and developments shaping our community. My goal with these columns is to inform, not to offer opinions, so you can stay connected with what's happening in Springwater.

Kraft Hockeyville 2026

Our beloved Elmvale Community Arena has been nominated for Kraft Hockeyville 2026, and this is our moment to rally together, celebrate, and show all of Canada what our rink means to this incredible community. For generations, the Elmvale Arena has been more than just ice and boards. When you walk into a small-town

Ontario arena on a crisp winter night, there's a feeling, a shared heartbeat that connects us all. From early morning practices to championship cheers, this place has been where our stories are written and our memories made.

The Elmvale Arena stands as the proud heart of our community, a place where tradition, teamwork, and hometown spirit come alive. It's home to two of our most cherished celebrations: the Elmvale Fall Fair and the Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival. These events capture the essence of Springwater and bring neighbours together, year after year.

It's also the home ice for the Elmvale Minor Hockey Association, the Elmvale Harvesters, the Elmvale Skating Club, and so many other local groups that embody the pride and energy that make Elmvale truly special. Now, we need your voices, stories, photos, and memories to help bring this title home. Share what the Elmvale Arena means to you, the moments, the people, and the pride that make it the beating heart of our town.

Here's how you can help. Visit our Hockeyville page (<https://hockeyville.kraftheinz.com/home>), submit your stories, post your photos, and make a difference!

Together, let's show the country that Elmvale isn't just a town that loves hockey, it's a

community built by it. For the kids lacing up today, the families cheering in the stands, and the generations yet to come, this rink is Elmvale, and it's ready for its next chapter.

Let's bring Kraft Hockeyville home!

Submitted by: Councillor Matt Garwood



DOUG DOWNEY
14 - 20 Bell Farm Rd.
Barrie, ON
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The team at **Karen Jakubos Professional Corporation** is excited to welcome our newest team member

Melissa Gauer | ACCOUNTANT

March 12, 2026



DOUG SHIPLEY MP
BARRIE - SPRINGWATER - ORO-MEDONTE
DOUG.SHIPLEY@PARL.GC.CA • (705) 728-2596
DOUGSHIPLEYMP.CA

Thursday, March 20, 10:30am to 1 pm
Saturday, March 28, 10:30 am to 3:30 pm
Monday, March 30, 2 pm to 5 pm
Thursday, April 9, 10:30 am to 1 pm
Saturday, April 11, 10:30 am to 3:30 pm
Monday, April 13, 2 pm to 5 pm

Member of Parliament
Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte

Community Update from Ward 1 Councillor Matt Garwood

Matt Garwood, Township of Springwater
Hello Springwater residents. I'm pleased to share updates on recent decisions and developments that are shaping our community. My goal with these columns is to inform, not to offer opinions, so you can stay connected with what's happening in Springwater.

Elmvalle District High School Fitness Centre:
Council approved up to \$32,000 from the Elmvalle District High School Donation Fund to purchase new fitness equipment. Staff will report back with options for providing public access to the upgraded facility.

Fire & Emergency Services Station 5 (Elmvalle) Renovations:

Council approved funding for interior renovations at Fire Station 5 in Elmvalle.



DOUG DOWNEY
14 - 20 Bell Farm Rd.
Barrie, ON
L4M 6E4

705-726-5538 | doug.downey@pc.ola.org

including the construction of a new bunker gear room.

Restructuring Compensation Agreement:
Council authorized the Springwater-Barrie Restructuring Compensation Agreement valued at \$22,080,000, along with an additional \$850,000 dedicated exclusively to economic development staffing and initiatives.

Water Billing and Leak Detection Enhancements:

Council directed staff to report on the adoption of automated meter reading to provide real-time water data and improve leak detection and conservation. Staff will also assess the feasibility of monthly or bi-monthly billing, as well as a potential leak forgiveness program, cost estimates, funding sources, and operational impacts.

Digital Speed Signs for Community Groups and Stakeholders:

Council directed staff to develop and implement a community cost-sharing program for the installation of additional digital speed signs. This model would enable organizations, community groups, and stakeholders to proactively contribute to local road safety enhancements.

Thank you for staying engaged in our

community's progress.
Councillor Matt Garwood



The team at **Karen Jakubos Professional Corporation** is excited to welcome our newest team member

Melissa Gauer | ACCOUNTANT

Melissa brings nearly 20 years of accounting experience in both corporate and personal tax work. With extensive knowledge of QuickBooks and Sage, she will be available to assist our clients

March 26, 2026

SPRINGWATER

Springwater Township Council

By Brian Belcourt

North Simcoe Springwater News

Springwater Township Council held its regular council meeting on March 18 in council chambers, following several earlier highly contentious sessions marked by disputes among councillors and residents.

In contrast, this meeting proceeded without the tensions seen in previous gatherings. Council moved through its regular business in a routine yet policy-relevant session, featuring several key presentations. Larry Simpson presented on behalf of the Springwater Sports Heritage group. Representatives from WSP and Watson & Associates also delivered the Lands Needs Assessment and Growth Management Strategy, including Greg Bender (WSP Planning),

Antoine Lahaie (WSP Servicing), and Adam Fischer and Daryll Abbs (Watson & Associates).

Council also addressed several municipal matters, including awarding the contract for the replacement of the Elmvale Community Hall-Springwater Health Services Centre roof, discussions surrounding the future of Spruce Grove Park, and other routine township business.

The meeting served as a welcome break from the heightened tensions of recent weeks, with council members appearing cordial and focused on working in the best interests of Springwater residents. The next regular council meeting is scheduled for April 1 at 6:30 p.m. Meetings continue to be held in a hybrid format, allowing community members to participate either in person at council chambers or remotely online.

Community Update from Ward 1 Councillor Matt Garwood

Hello Springwater residents. I'm pleased to share updates on recent decisions and developments that are shaping our community. My goal with these columns is to inform, not to offer opinions, so you can stay connected with what's happening in Springwater.

Kraft Hockeyville Nomination: Update

Over the past few weeks, our community came together in an incredible way for our Kraft Hockeyville nomination, and we couldn't be more proud.

While Elmvale was not selected as Ontario's recipient this year, the effort and spirit behind our nomination were nothing short of remarkable. Across the province, more than 500 arenas participated in the Hockeyville program, and Elmvale stood tall among them. Considering the short window we had to organize and rally the community, the response we received was truly something special. We also extend our

congratulations to the Ontario provincial recipient, Blackstock. Small-town arenas like ours are the heart of our communities and all are deserving of investment and support.

And when we talk about success, we measure it by something even more meaningful than the final result: the pride, participation, and community spirit that Elmvale showed throughout this entire process.

To everyone who submitted a story, posted a photo, wrote a rally note, shared our posts, or encouraged someone else to participate, thank you. You helped show the entire country what Elmvale is all about.

This may be the end of this year's Hockeyville journey, but one thing is certain... we'll be back next year.

And if this nomination proved anything, it's that when Elmvale comes together, amazing things happen.



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WE WANNA HEAR FROM YOU!
WHAT POLITICAL AND NEWS COVERAGE MATTER TO YOU?



APPENDIX 2

Full text of Councillor Garwood's March 4, 2026 Facebook post²¹

Ward 1 Community Update – February 2026

This month, I'm launching a new initiative to keep you better informed about Council's key discussions and decisions. Each month, I will share a brief summary highlighting items that directly affect our community. You can also find regular updates in my North Simcoe Springwater News column.

 *Elmvale Business Improvement Area Funding Request:*

Council received correspondence from the Elmvale BIA requesting that the Township dedicate funding toward a formal economic development function and updated strategy. The BIA emphasized the need for a dedicated resource to lead business attraction, retention, tourism promotion, and access to external funding.

 *Elmvale Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades:*

Council approved \$275,000 in additional funding from the Wastewater Reserve Fund to complete Phase 1 of the Elmvale Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades.

 *Elmvale Arena Dehumidification Project:*

Included in the 2026 budget, this \$184,824 project will resolve long-standing moisture issues and protect the Arena's structural integrity. The work supports both community use and asset longevity.

 *Voting Methods Review:*

Following public consultation and survey results, Council voted to issue an expedited Request for Information on remote internet voting. The proposal includes multiple personal identifiers for ballot access, adherence to DGSI standards, and enhanced security and cost evaluations. This step supports continued progress in voter accessibility.

 *Changes to Recycling Services:*

As of January 1, 2026, responsibility for recycling collection transferred from the County of Simcoe to Circular Materials under Ontario's producer-responsibility model. Emterra Environmental now provides collection services in Springwater. Under provincial policy, industrial, commercial, and institutional (ICI) properties

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/electgarwood>

such as small businesses, churches, and nonprofits are no longer eligible for curbside recycling. This change was made by the province, not local municipalities. Through a notice of motion I brought forward, Council formally expressed our concern and urged reconsideration of the policy.

 Elmvale District High School Fitness Centre:

Council approved up to \$32,000 from the Elmvale District High School Donation Fund to purchase new fitness equipment. Staff will report back on options for public access to the upgraded facility.

 Fire & Emergency Services Station 5 (Elmvale) Renovations:

Council approved funding of \$363,445.25 (including HST recoveries) for interior renovations and a new bunker gear room at Fire Station 5 (Elmvale), through Projects #2018-04 and #2023-80.

 Restructuring Compensation Agreement:

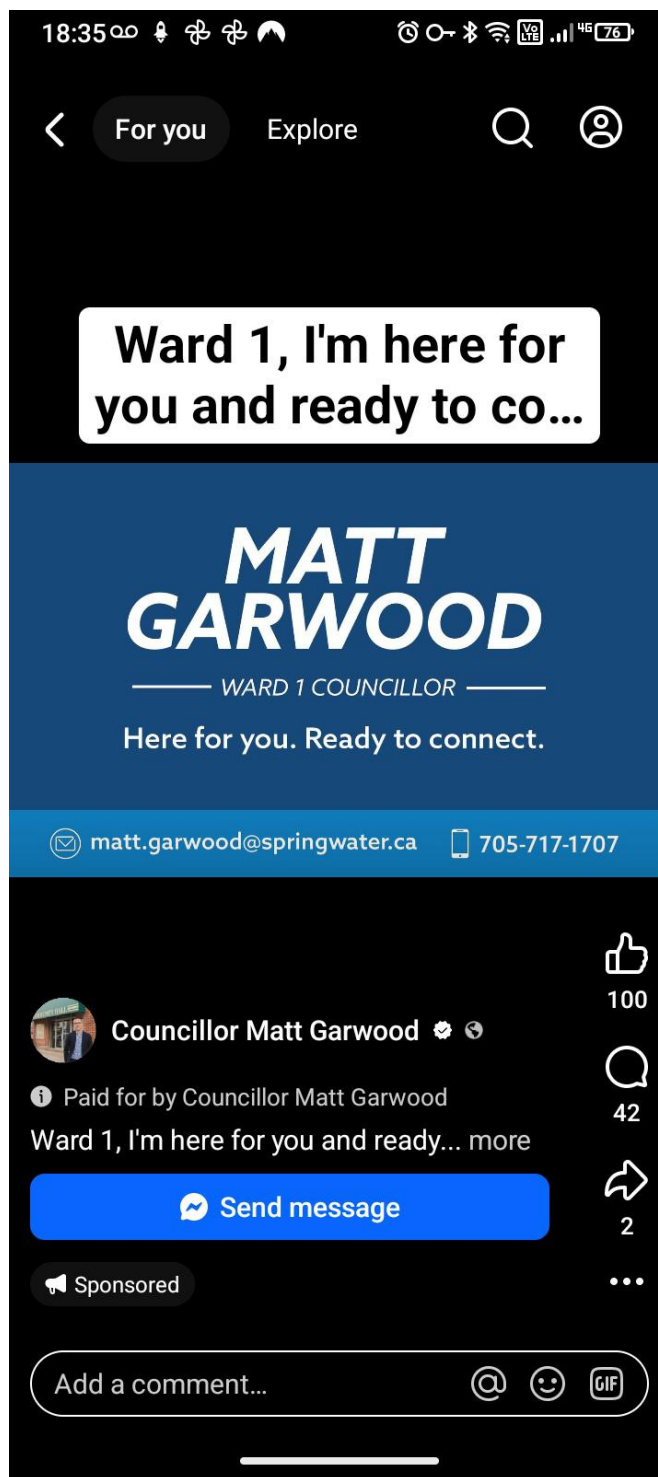
Council authorized the Springwater–Barrie Restructuring Compensation Agreement valued at \$22,080,000, plus an additional \$850,000 to be used exclusively for economic development staffing and initiatives.

 Water Billing and Leak Detection Enhancements:

Through my notice of motion, Council directed staff to report on adopting automated meter reading for real-time water data to improve leak detection and conservation. Staff will also assess the feasibility of monthly or bi-monthly billing, along with a potential leak forgiveness program, cost estimates, and operational impacts.

APPENDIX 3

Screen captures of paid social media advertisements provided by Deputy Mayor Cabral with his Complaint



9:24



Councillor Matt Garwood

**Councillor Matt Garwood** 

Sponsored · Paid for by Councillor Matt Garwood ·

Ward 1, I'm here for you and ready to connect.

matt.garwood@springwater.ca

705-717-1707

705-728-4784 Ext. 2020

**MATT
GARWOOD**

— WARD 1 COUNCILLOR —

Here for you. Ready to connect.



matt.garwood@springwater.ca



705-717-1707

Messenger



Send message



82



40



2



Most relevant



Stephanie hh · 4w by Author

Thank YOU!!! ...Only in Elmvale...

**Chat with us**

Learn about this ad



Message



We appreciate you!!!@ You have consistently

Write a comment...

9:23     HD LTE   89 

 **facebook**   

     6 

Last Seen: Yates Center, KS
Age Now :15 Years Old

 What is the current status of the search?  What is

 1.9K  336  2K   

 **Councillor Matt Garwood**   

Sponsored · Paid for by Councillor Matt Garwood · 

Ward 1, I'm here for you and ready to connect.... more

MATT GARWOOD
— WARD 1 COUNCILLOR —
Here for you. Ready to connect.

 matt.garwood@springwater.ca  705-717-1707

Messenger  Send message

APPENDIX 4

Article referenced in Councillor Garwood's formal Response²²

December 2, 2023

Wayne Doyle, Barrie Today

Priceless' communication in Springwater comes with price

Direct-mail quarterly newsletter will be outdated before it hits residents' doorsteps, says township councillor

Springwater council is facing a challenge people in the communications industry have been facing for years: What's the best and most cost-effective way to deliver your message to your audience?

The township is always looking to share information with residents, but has been struggling with how best to get that information distributed.

For years, the municipality booked bi-weekly ads in the local newspaper, but decided earlier this year it might be better to produce a newsletter internally and mail it directly to township residents.

According to a report to council prepared by Nicole Audette, the township's communications officer, the proposed Springwater Link base operating budget for 2024 equates to \$54,000. This is based on an 8.5x11 newsletter with 18 editions considered in the year.

According to Linda Belcourt of Springwater News, if the township booked 18 insertions, the township would have been charged \$610 per insertion, plus tax. Printing a one-page, 8.5x11, double-sided mailer on 100 pound glossy paper costs \$1,050 per edition. The total cost of printing and mailing 12 editions (one per month) would be \$40,075.

Staff also considered producing a larger, more robust publication — two-page, 11x17-inch paper, printed both sides (eight pages) on 70-pound stock for a printing cost of \$5,580 per issue. The total cost of printing and mailing four editions (one

²² 'Priceless' communication in Springwater comes with price" (Wayne Doyle, Barrie Today, December 2, 2023) https://www.barrietoday.com/local-news/priceless-communication-in-springwater-comes-with-price-7910701#google_vignette

every three months) would be \$22,320.

One councillor, Matt Garwood, said he is not in favour of the quarterly option and wondered why it has to be an either/or decision.

"I have grave concerns about this," Garwood said at a recent budget meeting. "We consistently talk about how communication is priceless and how we all heard about it when we were canvassing our communities during last year's election.

"I'm not in favour of the direct mailer, but who's to say we can't split those options up and communicate in both?"

Garwood recommended council opt for the quarterly direct mailer and supplement it with advertising in the municipal newspaper when the direct mailer is not being sent.

The cost of his suggestion would be about \$46,000 annually.

Deputy Mayor George Cabral believes a quarterly publication would suffice, since much of the township's news is cyclical and doesn't change much year-to-year.

"If we look at something like this quarterly, it's almost like a magazine," he said. "Most of the information we provide is similar every year, you know, when winter maintenance is going out. This would provide us with an opportunity to put this out and the app will augment this."

Cabral is referring to the Springwater App, which should be available to township residents sometime in the first quarter of 2024.

Garwood still wasn't convinced and made the case for newspaper advertising once more.

"It's not a bad idea to send out multiple pages of information, but a direct-mail newsletter on a quarterly basis is going to be outdated before it hits residents' doorsteps," he said.

To drive home his point, Garwood held up a recent edition of the monthly newsletter.

"Already half of the things on here have passed," he said. "Are we communicating

just to send a piece of paper in the mail, or are we communicating to provide the best possible information and service to our residents?"

Coun. Danielle Alexander wasn't sure why council was even talking about the municipal newspaper as an option, because it wasn't presented as one in the staff report. The staff report was focused on the financial options available to council for newsletter production and distribution.

Coun. Brad Thompson liked the hybrid option and thought being back in the local newspaper would be of value.

Coun. Anita Moore said Springwater council might want to look to Essa Township for direction. She said Essa residents get an 8.5-x-11 colour copy that comes out four times a year.

"That's all they get," Moore said.

In the end, council voted to go with a monthly 8.5x11 inch newsletter printed in colour on 50-pound stock with multiple pages and a weight of less than 50 grams to ensure there was no increase to the mailing fee.

APPENDIX 5

Excerpts from Township's Council Remuneration and Expense Policy²³

Purpose

... The Township of Springwater shall provide members of Council with fair compensation for reasonable permitted expenses incurred while carrying out their respective roles and responsibilities.

...

7. Discretionary Funds

... Members of Springwater Township Council are provided with a Discretionary Fund on an annual basis which are intended to provide Members with resources to:

- assist them in fulfilling their role ... on Springwater Council;*
- conduct meetings and communicate with their constituents and other stakeholders;*
- maintain connection with their constituents at events, such as charitable events, organization/agency celebrations, etc; and*
- represent the municipality at functions, events, or conferences.*

Members are the stewards of Township resources and are ultimately accountable to the public and their constituents for the type and level of expenses they incur. ... [T]he public expects public funds to be used solely for the fulfillment of their public duties. As such, Members' expenses should be reasonable and reflect what the public expects of an elected official. ...

Discretionary Fund Allotments:

... [T]he current allotments are as follows: ...

... Ward Councillors - \$1,000 each annually

²³ Council Remuneration and Expense Policy (September 7, 2022)
<https://springwater.civicweb.net/FileStorage/6E2C9A9C1EFE43E4A9AC01CABBCBA136-A09-COU%20Council%20Remuneration%20and%20Expense%20Policy%20-%20.pdf>

- *Funds can be utilized for items such as:*
 - ...
 - *Promotional material related to Township business (non-election related);*
 - *Constituent newsletters & associated postage costs (non-election related);*
 - ...

Any unused portion of the annual allotment will not be carried forward ...

Spending Guidelines and Restrictions:

- *... Members of Council cannot claim expenses of a personal nature (i.e. clothing, footwear, lost luggage, etc.);*
- *Eligible expenses must not conflict with rules set out in other related legislation and policies (i.e. Election-related, Council Code of Conduct, etc.)*
- *No expense shall create a conflict of interest, or the appearance of such ... that may arise through the purchase of goods or services; including from a family member;*
- ...
- *... Expenses incurred by third parties cannot be claimed. ...*
- ...

Approval of expenses:

... The reimbursement of expenses related to Council Discretionary Funds will be approved by the Mayor.

Where disputes arise ... the matter will be brought forward to a meeting of Council for final decision-making regarding the payment or reimbursement of expenses.

Public Disclosure:

In the spirit of accountability and transparency, the individual expenses for Members of Springwater Township Council will be publicly disclosed on the Township's website on a quarterly basis. ...

... [A] Statement of Remuneration, Benefits and Expenses paid to Council Members ... will be reported to Council and the public each year.