

## **Newcomers to Springwater, other residents, taxes and other things**

Newcomers may not be aware of the plan to add 10,000 more houses to Midhurst and both old and new Springwater residents may not be aware of the increases in property taxes that await us if this large development were to go through. The following provides an update on the latest developments and explains the threat that Springwater faces to taxes, our water supplies and the local environment.

The path to approvals for property development in Ontario is long and many conditions have to be met. But as with most government decisions, there are exceptions to every rule and the most "generous" developers somehow seem to win the most concessions. In theory, approvals in our area are only granted to developments which conform to the provincial *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. The Midhurst proposal does not. It conforms only to the "*Special Rule*" made specifically for Midhurst by the Minister of Infrastructure. The "*Special Rule*" is contained in special transition regulations which, according to the OMB, now form part of the *Growth Plan*. (See YouTube Special Rule for Midhurst).

Can you imagine the profits associated with selling 10,000 homes? Is it any wonder that developers can afford to fund election campaigns, and lawyers to overcome the objections of resident's interest groups at the OMB? The *Midhurst Ratepayers' Association* (MRA) stayed the course at the OMB hearings for four years and at one point had the Province, the County and the Township supporting our position, but one by one they backed down in the face of endless legal expenses.

But, for the moment at least, the project is stalled for environmental reasons. In Ontario there is a procedure called *Environmental Assessment* (EA) in which developers must prove that their proposal is environmentally sound. To do this, developers hire consulting companies to study the potential effects on such things as water quality, wild life, vegetation, forests, wetlands, air pollution, aboriginal rights, etc.

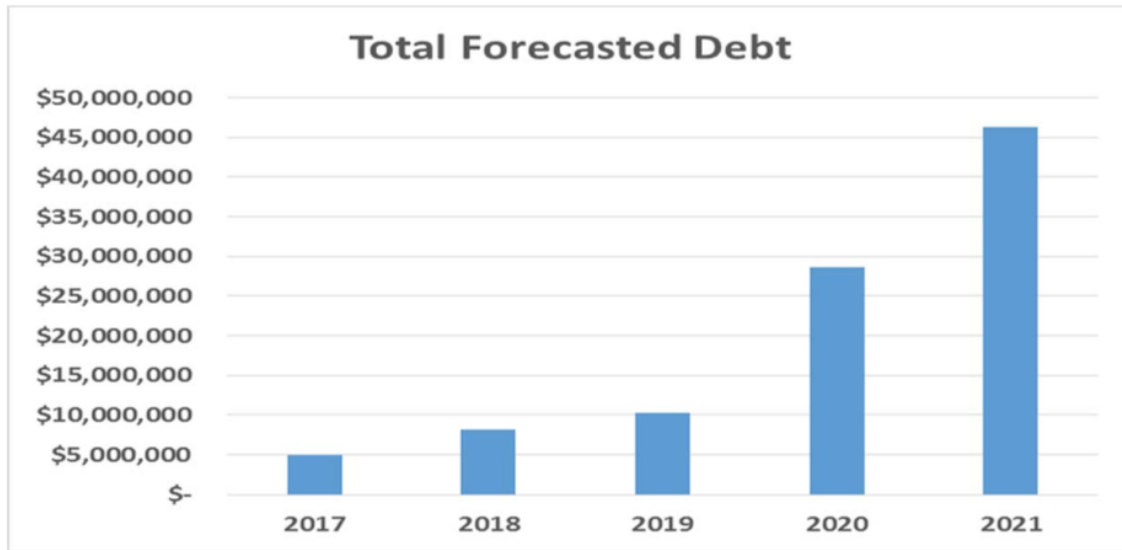
Worried that the developer-funded EA reports might be biased, MRA hired an independent hydrogeologist to peer review just one of them - the Midhurst Water Supply report. We found many unanswered questions. Nothing in the report provides assurances that there will be enough well water to support this huge development in the long term and there are also reasons to believe that the wildlife in and around Willow Creek and in the Minesing Wetlands, will be seriously affected, or in some cases even destroyed by the redirection of groundwater.

Our hydrogeologist made a direct public presentation to Springwater Council, who in turn passed the concerns on to the province. MRA followed up with a written submission to the Ministry of the Environment. The result has been that after 6 months the province has still not seen fit to approve the *Environmental Study Report*.

In addition to EA concerns, there is also Springwater traffic and local property taxes to consider. These concerns affect the entire municipality of Springwater. A glance to the south in Barrie offers an insight into what might be expected. The traffic congestion is obvious and, if you know someone in Barrie, you may know that their property taxes are considerably higher for the same size property than in Springwater. In fact, in almost every jurisdiction which has seen rapid growth, property taxes and municipal debts are much higher than in rural Ontario. No surprise when you consider that more people demand more schools, more fire services, more policing,

sewage treatment plants, libraries, recreational centres, etc. But we chose to live in rural Ontario not in a big city, so what can we do to safeguard our way of life?

The attached graph is taken from Springwater's draft budget and shows the effect that development is having on Springwater's level of debt. From less than \$5m today our debt is forecast to



2018 Budget

Page 32

balloon to over \$45m in just four years! A factor of 9x!

Most Springwater councillors are opposed to the Midhurst Secondary Plan (MSP) and all believe that the development is far too large for Springwater, but it is only the Midhurst Ratepayers' Association which is taking action to stop the MSP. MRA is working hard to raise funds for legal and professional advice and this is where you can help. MRA won an award in 2016 from the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO), for our work to preserve Natural Heritage. As a result of an agreement reached with ACO, any Springwater resident can now get a tax deduction for making a charitable donation to the "Save Midhurst" fund. This is a great way to protect your way of life and get a tax deduction for doing so. ACO deducts a commission for its service, but if you prefer your donation to be delivered in full and much sooner, you can also make a donation directly to MRA and forgo the tax receipt. Details of both methods can be found at [www.friendsofmidhurst.ca](http://www.friendsofmidhurst.ca). If you donate via ACO, please remember to state for "Save Midhurst".

This month we received a donation of \$500 from a Midhurst senior. It is greatly appreciated, but much more is needed to help us catch up with payments to our professional consultants. If you are able, please support the cause. Thank you.

David Strachan  
Midhurst Ratepayers' Association