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Springfield Taxpayers Rights Corporation

Until construction started at 22054 Oakwood Road, the area residents had no knowledge of the impending change to our neighbourhood and the subsequent loss of our quality of lifestyle.

Once we learned about Berger Peat Moss buying the property this is what we found out: As early as 2019 Springfield Council and senior staff started having private conversations with a Quebec based company that wanted to locate in Springfield. This company, Berger, was looking at a location west of PR 207 just south of Oakwood Road, a former equine boarding and riding facility. Berger, a company that has 8 facilities across Canada, including the peat moss mining operation by Hadashville, was looking to develop a peat moss mixing plant closer to Winnipeg, because it has a large labour pool.

The first public indication of this company moving into Springfield, that is recorded, is a resolution passed after Council comes out of a Closed Meeting on March 28, 2019; stating *“council agrees with the recent reclassification of peat moss by the Manitoba Government as an agricultural product”*. Inquiries with the Province confirmed this is not true. **No other evidence** supports this unwarranted change but it turns out that this action by Springfield Council was intended to allow an industrial operation to be constructed on land which is **identified in the Development Plan and Zoning By-law as “Agriculture Use or Agriculture Preserve”**. In April of 2019, Council passed another resolution to amend the Zoning By-law to include peat moss in the definition of agricultural activities. They did not proceed with a required by-law amendment.

We have since approached Council on a number of occasions, asking for information and asking that construction be stopped until a public hearing of some kind was conducted. At our second meeting we even submitted a link to a petition containing 376 signatures requesting Council to hear its ratepayers concerns and hold a public hearing. We felt that a Development Plan amendment and subsequent Zoning By-law amendment should have been held but at the very least a Conditional Use hearing would allow for some public input. These requests were unanimously rejected by council.

The municipality stated no hearing is required and has taken the position that peat is used in farming and is therefore an agricultural activity or an agriculture

horticulture and would be too expensive for normal farming practices. **Peat moss is not an agricultural product; it is a mined product used as a soil additive.**

In June 2020, the Municipality issued a development permit to Berger and they are currently constructing a 44,000 Sq. Ft. main building for the collection, processing and production of up to 1.5 million bags of loose peat and 2.5 million bags of compressed peat that will be mixed with chemicals, yearly. When fully developed the 160 acre parcel of Agricultural Land, will be used for millions of pounds of raw material storage; processing and manufacturing production and finished goods storage and packaging. The plant will operate 24/7 with shift changes throughout the night and early morning including weekends. Besides taking 160 acres of agricultural land out of production permanently, light, noise and air pollution and well-water quality are all issues of serious concern and most people would have to agree that such a manufacturing facility has no business being located in a residential agricultural community.

All our numerous efforts to reason with Council have failed and we feel we have been locked out by them. To make sure our position on this issue is legitimate and valid; we resorted to hiring a number of professionals to obtain independent opinions. A lengthy review by a Legal Team, Property Appraiser and a Licensed Community Planner confirmed our worst fears: even though it is industrial in our opinion and not compatible with the surrounding area, it undoubtedly will be detrimental to our health and general welfare, overall quality of life and our property values will be severely impacted living beside this new industrial manufacturer.

Current Council has clearly shown their primary concern is not to protect and ensure the rights and land values of the average property owner. They have demonstrated they are willing to throw Springfield residents under the bus in favour of new business development regardless of the business type, location, due process, and without fully considering any negative effects it will have on nearby property owners, our lifestyles, property values and our right to expect a safe and reliable community.

What homeowner would want to live next to a potential polluter and industrial manufacturer that has a large corporate footprint that will keep expanding? This is exactly the reason why the long range land use planning by-laws are essential. The RM of Springfield Development Plan passed just **2 years ago** designated specific industrial zoned locations within the RM where

Zoning by-laws were developed with the involvement of the ratepayers of Springfield: openly, with public representation via delegations and public hearings, and even received Provincial approval. We feel, it is very reasonable that we should be able to rely on those by-laws for our future and for our elected officials to abide by them.

So after several attempts to communicate and work with our Council, only to be dismissed offhand and virtually silenced by them: a number of ratepayers have decided instead to take action and become collective voice and speak against the lack of proper governance and this type of unplanned development.

We are going to use what rights we have available to us.

We have registered as a non-profit company called ***Springfield Taxpayers Rights Corp.*** Our **purpose** is to create a more permanent and stronger watchdog organization to identify and oppose not only this issue, but when necessary, take action against other improper practices taken by Council as they appear to be favouring commercial development over its citizens rights. We are no longer willing to sit back and allow this council and administration to flaunt our municipality's laws and past practices, and ignoring due democratic process.

A **priority** of The ***Springfield Taxpayers Rights Corp*** is to advocate for fairness and accountability.

After months of trying all other avenues we can think of to correct this unfairness we are left with this last option: and we will be commencing legal action to stop this wrongful use on Ag land.

What happened on 22054 Oakwood Road, could happen again, could happen in almost any other location. This should serve as a warning to all ratepayers in Springfield.

If you would like more information on **Springfield Taxpayers Rights Corp.** please contact us. We are looking for like- minded community stakeholders to build a strong voice in OUR COMMUNITY.

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