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2022 Municipal Election Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate Name:

Municipality

Date:

Hale Mahon

Township of Springwater

September 16, 2022

Please return the completed questionnaire to the sender as soon as possible, but no later than September 15, 2022. The answers will then be posted on the AWARE Simcoe website.

N.B: As this is a Word document, you can take as much space as you wish to respond.

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1. AWARE Simcoe considers the preservation of farmland, the protection of water resources and natural heritage, and providing transparency and accountability in government decision making to be the primary issues of this election. Our goal is to elect representatives who support those objectives. Do you agree with this?

I agree with these principles. On my platform (<https://www.halemahon.ca/platform>) you'll see that two of my top issues this election are *Strengthening Communities*, which includes making sure any future development respects residents and the environment, and *Listening to Residents*, which includes being accessible to all residents to discuss their concerns.

One of the reasons Springwater is such a coveted place to live is because of our natural areas, and these should be preserved. We need to make sure any new development is done with climate and agriculture in mind. I also believe in requiring existing approved developments to incorporate natural areas and outdoor and active recreation opportunities into their subdivision plans. Springwater is also home to some of the cleanest water in the world, which needs to be preserved. Springwater is a mainly agricultural township. We need to support farmers both by preserving as much farmland as possible, but also by making it more feasible for farms to stay in the family and continue to operate.

It is also important for residents to have access to information about the issues the Township is addressing and have open dialogue on those issues with their Councillor. I would do this with regular updates about Council meetings and other Township discussions via social media and a Councillor email newsletter. I would be accessible to all residents to discuss their concerns and ideas. I would actively listen and take into consideration what I hear. I would also have frequent consultations, surveys, and town hall meetings with residents.

To ensure good government, I would take a thoughtful approach to decision-making and work collaboratively with stakeholders, other councillors, and staff.

2. Do you feel there is a need to protect water, wetlands and recharge areas from development, aggregate extraction and other intrusive activities in your municipality? If so, how will you achieve this?

I believe there is a need to protect water, wetlands, and recharge areas. Springwater is under tremendous growth pressure. There is a clear demand for housing and an influx of new residents moving mostly from bigger cities. It's understandable that people want to live here – Springwater is a great place to live. But we cannot allow development to encroach on agriculture and natural areas in an irresponsible way.

I would find this balance by applying a climate lens to decisions on new housing and aggregate projects. This would include asking staff to assess the impact of each development on the aquifer and the supply and quality of groundwater. This would make sure the aquifer stays healthy against the large-scale risks that these projects can cause.

3. Ancient deposits under the Simcoe Uplands in Simcoe County's Tiny, Springwater, Oro-Medonte and Tay townships contain pristine groundwater. This water is the purest water known to science, and is the gold standard for water worldwide, a national and global treasure. Ongoing gravel pit extractions on French's Hill, the water recharge area, now threaten to destroy this precious water. Will you work to protect this important local resource?

I would work hard to preserve the world-class water in the aquifers beneath our region.

Primarily, I would listen to and heed the advice of experts on this and all environmental issues. They have extensive knowledge about the issue itself, potential risks to water, mitigating these risks, and best practices for water management. I would seek advice from staff engineers as well as outside research and advocacy groups. To that end, I would not support the expansion of gravel extraction to water recharge areas.

I would also prioritize managing spills and the negative impacts of extraction, including by more quickly addressing these risks. This would address more immediate groundwater problems and protect it against existing risks.

4. Do you support/oppose expansion of the Greenbelt into Simcoe County? In either case, please explain why.

I agree with the concept of more thoroughly protecting agricultural and environmental lands, but I also hear the concerns of farmers that the Greenbelt could impede their ability to manage their own land. I would need to hear more information from the provincial government on how exactly the Greenbelt expansion would affect property owners and natural areas and how it would function in relation to growth requirements. I also want to hear from residents of all different backgrounds on how an expansion would affect them. We need long-term and thoughtful discussions between municipalities, the province, advocacy groups, conservation authorities, and farmers – the stewards of the land for centuries – where everyone comes to the table with environmental and agricultural protection in mind.

5. What are your plans to combat climate change in your municipality?

Climate change is a serious issue and is already impacting us in different ways.

I recently attended the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference, which gathered hundreds of municipal leaders (councillors, mayors, staff, engineers, advocates, and others). I talked to so many people about the issues impacting municipalities and came back with several ideas to apply here to make Springwater a better place. Many of these municipalities are applying a 'climate lens' to issues that come before Council.

I would apply a climate lens to my decisions at Council meetings. I would also request that township staff apply a climate lens and include climate considerations in staff reports. Staff reports already include a section about the financial implications of any decision. Having a section to highlight the impacts on the climate of policies and programs would keep the climate top of mind for Council.

More specifically, one of the biggest contributors to emissions in Springwater is people driving from home to access goods, services, and to go to work. This is inevitable with Springwater being mainly rural. But as our population grows, especially in residential subdivisions, we can incorporate the services for which people would typically drive to a bigger city, right in their neighbourhood. These include the local corner store, doctors' offices, recreational amenities, and more.

In terms of neighbourhood planning, I would not support projects that build on environmentally protected (EP) land. I would also incentivize builders to use sustainable materials and building processes. This could be done by reducing fees and timelines for builders that cooperate with us on our sustainability goals. For township projects, I would favour bids by contractors who use sustainable materials and practices.

On top of prevention, I would also work hard to respond to the impact of climate change. I would implement a more comprehensive plan to respond to weather events and climate-related infrastructure damage to make sure residents can count on reliable services from the township.

6. Every municipality in Ontario is faced with row-on-row sprawl-style development, and surrounding farmland is being destructively gobbled up with little regard for future agricultural needs. Ontario is losing 319 acres of farmland every day, it needs to be protected before it's too late. We need to ensure we have the land to grow food for today and future generations. Once it's paved over, it's gone forever! How will you protect agricultural lands within your municipality?

Springwater is mainly an agricultural township and respecting agriculture in Springwater is a top priority.

Similar to the climate lens through which I would look at all decisions, I would apply an agriculture lens to decisions on new developments and ensure that residential growth has as little an impact as possible on agricultural lands. I would do this by encouraging development to happen in previously-identified intensification areas, which are beneficial because they are typically closer to

existing neighbourhoods, not located in productive agriculture areas, and prevent urban sprawl. I would also support 'discrete density' which includes granny suites and low-density multi-unit housing that fits in with existing communities. Discrete density adds additional housing units, which is much needed to fix the housing supply problem and high housing prices but ensures that housing growth is not happening at the expense of agriculture.

In addition to preserving farmland, I believe the township should also support farmers in any way they can. This would include:

- Increasing opportunities for agri-tourism, which would leverage the rural character of Springwater to increase tourism while also adding more revenue for local farms and building the local economy.
- Rezoning farm gate sales locations from a commercial designation to an agricultural designation to reduce their property tax rate, as recommended by the Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition.
- Creating a database of farms that sell to the public and making it available for everyone to see, increasing sales for farmers and local food options for residents.
- Supporting often-forgotten agricultural operations like maple syrup farms and apiaries.
- Allowing farmers to more easily manage their land for agricultural purposes, like with on-farm units for employees and land severances.
- Taking action to maintain and improve municipal drains, including the Swaley drain, that farmers in the Minesing area and all over Springwater have been requesting.

7. Simcoe County Council chose a county forest in Springwater Twp – zoned Agricultural, as the site for a (much needed) waste handling facility, the Environmental Resource Recovery Centre (ERRC). Many residents in Simcoe County objected to this location, pointing out that this is an industrial use and there are suitable properties zoned Industrial where the facility should be built. What is your view?

Living in the area of the planned ERRC location, I have many of the same concerns that I've heard while talking to residents. The County of Simcoe's official plan amendment to allow for the ERRC at the property on Horseshoe Valley Road was approved by the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs in 2018. The official plan amendment was appealed to the Ontario Land Tribunal (formerly OMB/LPAT) by residents and advocacy groups but the tribunal was "satisfied that the concerns... have been considered and addressed" and dismissed the appeals. However, the site plan has not yet been approved.

The tribunal stated that the project "requires further and on-going [*sic*] evaluation of the detailed site plan and operational aspects of the ERRC, which will involve oversight and approvals from three levels of government, all respectively charged with making decisions involving public environmental assessment processes."

This is an opportunity for some of our concerns to be addressed. I would consult with residents to hear their concerns about the ERRC and ensure those concerns are addressed by all levels of government involved in granting approvals.

8. If elected, what are your top three priorities?

1. Smart budgeting – respecting taxpayers and making sure money is spent wisely
2. Strengthening communities – priorities include the infrastructure, safety, traffic, and environmental sustainably
3. Listening to residents – being the open and accountable representative that you deserve

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Thank you for completing the AWARE Simcoe candidate questionnaire.