StandOurGround.ca NEWSLETTER

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Russell Resident Don Greer Asks: Who Pays, Who Profits, Who Loses in Russell?

As a resident of Russell, one of my greatest concerns is how many people are actually paying attention to the decisions being considered that could affect the future of our community. Important proposals can move forward while many residents remain unaware of what is at stake until the decisions have been made and the consequences become impossible to reverse.

Being informed is essential, but information alone accomplishes very little if nobody acts on it. Reading about a proposal, discussing it privately, or expressing frustration among friends will not necessarily change its outcome. **If we care about our community, we must be prepared to speak up, ask questions, challenge assumptions and hold decision-makers accountable.**

Writing about an issue is a good first step. It brings concerns into the open, encourages discussion, and gives others an opportunity to become informed. But it must not be the last step. The real test is whether residents are willing to turn awareness into action before important decisions are made on their behalf.

The following proposal raises questions about public spending, community recreation, and the future of Russell's agricultural identity. It deserves attention, informed discussion and a response from the people who care about where our community is heading.



RUSSELL: WHO PAYS, WHO PROFITS AND WHO LOSES?

Public Land, Taxpayer Costs and the future of Russell's Agricultural Community

Russell Township is apparently considering a proposal that deserves serious public scrutiny. Allegedly, the Township would pay to demolish its existing ice rink, transfer the cleared land to a developer for free, provide concessions on development charges and servicing costs, and potentially sacrifice a portion of the adjacent agricultural property to facilitate a low-cost housing development.

Affordable housing is important. But who decided Russell taxpayers should pay the price?

The developer typically expects to make what is described as a "small" profit. Yet without transparent, independently verified financial information, how can taxpayers assess the true costs, the developer's actual return, or whether this arrangement represents good value for the community?

Russell would surrender a public asset, pay demolition costs and potentially absorb expenses that would otherwise form part of the development. Those costs do not disappear. They are ultimately borne by taxpayers.

Meanwhile, a new ice facility in neighbouring Embrun has already been built and is expected to open within months. Why should Russell demolish its existing rink at taxpayer expense without first demonstrating that retaining it is not a viable option? The new facility's user fees, accessibility and available ice time may not meet the needs of everyone who currently uses Russell's rink.

AN AGRICULTURAL ANCHOR IS AT STAKE

The value of the adjacent agricultural property lies in its role as a venue for agricultural events and shows. This represents a gathering place that helps preserve Russell's agricultural identity and connects the community with its rural heritage.

Agriculture is more than the cultivation of fields. It is part of Russell's history, identity and community life.

Allowing even a small portion of this property to be absorbed into development raises an important question: where does the encroachment stop? Once land and community space are surrendered, recovering them may be impossible.

Introducing a low-cost housing development beside an established agricultural events venue could also create conflicts over noise, traffic, and the normal activities associated with agricultural shows. Those consequences deserve careful assessment before any decision is made.

For **StandOurGround**, protecting this property means protecting more than land. It means preserving an important community resource and ensuring that Russell's agricultural identity is not gradually displaced by development pressures.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE COST?

Housing affordability is a shared responsibility involving federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Russell must not confuse a worthwhile social objective with a financially sound proposal.

Giving away public land, paying for demolition, waiving development charges and absorbing servicing costs requires a clear demonstration of public benefit.

Before proceeding, the Township should disclose the full financial implications, independently establish the value of its contribution, explain the conditions protecting long-term affordability and demonstrate why alternative sites or arrangements are not feasible.

A development is not truly low-cost simply because taxpayers absorb part of the bill.

Russell residents deserve responsible spending, accessible recreation and protection of the community's agricultural heritage. Ask your elected representatives for the independent numbers. Demand transparency before public assets are surrendered and valued community space is lost.

Once decisions are made, costs are committed and land is transferred, it is usually already too late to change course.

Our public assets are not free. Our agricultural heritage is not expendable. And taxpayers deserve better than being handed the bill without a clear accounting of the benefits.

StandOurGround: Protect our agricultural land and our community.

Cheers, Don Greer

A NOTE TO READERS

The views expressed in this article represent my personal opinion and are intended to encourage informed public discussion about matters that may affect Russell's residents, taxpayers and agricultural community.

I do not claim to have all the answers, nor do I suggest that every aspect of the proposal or its potential financial implications has been independently verified. My purpose is to raise legitimate questions, encourage transparency and invite residents and decision-makers to provide relevant information, clarification and alternative perspectives.

I welcome constructive discussion and corrections to any factual inaccuracies. Ultimately, the objective is not to prejudge a decision or assign blame, but to ensure that decisions affecting public assets, taxpayer money and our community's future are made openly, responsibly and with the benefit of informed public participation.

Regards, Don Greer

Want to Know Where Your Mayor and Councillors Stand?

Russell residents can take an active role by contacting their elected councillors directly by phone or email to ask where they stand on this proposal and related issues. Some councillors also share their views on their Facebook/Web pages, which are worth checking. Ask questions, seek clear answers, and find out how your representatives intend to protect taxpayers' interests, recreational facilities and Russell's agricultural heritage. These decisions affect our community for years to come, and residents have every right to know their councillors' positions before decisions are made. **Make your voice heard. Contact your councillors and ask for answers.**

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The Rustler: A Valuable Voice for Our Community

A strong community depends on informed residents. That is why *The Rustler* is such a valuable resource for Russell Township.

Available at ***TheRustler.ca***, this independent local news publication keeps residents informed about municipal council, development, infrastructure, local businesses, community events and the people who make our villages special.

Decisions made at the municipal level affect our taxes, roads, recreational facilities, farmland and rural way of life. Local journalism helps residents understand these issues, ask questions and hold elected officials accountable.

The Rustler also celebrates our community by sharing local stories, promoting events and highlighting the work of residents and organizations.

In an age when so much information comes from social media, having a dedicated source of local news is more important than ever.

An informed community is a stronger community. Visit ***TheRustler.ca,*** read the stories and share them with your neighbours. Supporting local journalism helps keep us connected, informed and involved in the future of our community.



StandOurGround*.ca welcomes your feedback, counterarguments, photographs, and written submissions for our Newsletter. Kindly inform us if you would like your Letter to the Editor to remain anonymous.*

standourground.ca | **standourground.russell@gmail.com**