



## SSJ – Restructuring Fact Sheet

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### **Background**

At least since the late 1990's, through multiple municipal terms of government, Council(s) of Sundridge, Strong, and Joly (SSJ), as well as their residents, have continuously asked the questions about what the opportunity of amalgamating looks like, what benefits might be realized by its residents, and what the cost of doing so may be.

Finally, in 2019, the SSJ Tri-Council resolved to create a task force to advance a study of restructuring in the community (based on the amalgamation of the three SSJ municipalities) to determine whether it would be beneficial to the municipalities to join and operate as one or to continue to operate through shared services.

The preliminary study of the task force identified enough potential benefits that the SSJ Tri-Council was compelled to further the study, and resolved to form a Committee to formalize the study efforts. Two Councillors and one staff member from each municipality were appointed to represent the interests of each individual municipality within the Committee, and a representative of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing attends meetings as an observer to answer any technical questions that the Committee has.

A work plan, with timelines, was drawn up, and the Committee has met monthly, mostly on schedule with its study. An inventory of equipment, personnel, and finances has been completed to the extent possible. With the information gathered, the Committee worked to create what an ideal mock Municipality would look like.

The Committee resolved (with financial support from all three municipalities), to hire an independent third party consultant to engage with the public for the purpose of:

- Informing the general public of the facts, particularly to answer commonly asked questions;
- Demonstrating to the public the work that the Committee has completed so far, i.e. what the mock municipality would look like; and
- To gather questions and concerns from the public to further their study with the objective of coming back with answers at a second public meeting later in 2025.

### **Facts & Answers**

Q: Does the public get an opportunity to vote on amalgamation?

A: No, the Municipal Act does not allow for restructuring matters to be determined through a referendum. If Councils can clearly see substantial benefits to amalgamation vs. shared

services, it is at their discretion to submit restructuring orders to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the final decision rests with the Minister.

Q: Will Strong and Joly residents pay for Sundridge's sewers and garbage pickup.

A: No, services like sewers and garbage pickup are fees for services applied on top of regular municipal taxes. If you don't get garbage pickup or sewers, you don't pay for those services.

Q: Will my taxes go up?

A: The Committee has only completed a preliminary financial analysis, it is extremely complex mathematics which requires further study from technical experts. Taxes may increase with or without amalgamation, and may increase more or less if amalgamation occurs. It's inescapable the fact that no two municipalities anywhere have exactly the same tax rates, thus, there will be, to an extent yet to be determined, an increase or decrease to municipal tax rates depending on which municipality you live in. A restructuring proposal could include provisions to phase-in taxes over time. The Minister could consider and choose to include tax phase-in provisions in a restructuring Order.

Q: How do we know the study is transparent/unbiased, that our voices are heard, and that our questions and concerns will be considered?

A: The Committee has equal democratic representation on the Committee (i.e. 2 Councillors paying taxes in each of Sundridge, Strong and Joly) and has resolved to hire independent third party consultants:

- 1) To complete the public engagement that will be facilitated through surveys and public meetings, to ensure that all residents have a reasonable opportunity to voice their concerns and have their questions answered. This outreach will include various types of promotion.
- 2) To complete the expert technical analysis of the financial information to ensure there are no biases, the information is accurate, and can be trusted by the taxpayers/constituents.

### **Mock Municipality**

- Ward system (map shown below)
- 4 Councillors, one from each of the 4 wards, and a Mayor at large
- Organization structure, showing additional staff for parks and recreation; mechanic; planner etc. Gradual increase of staff with growth
- Locations of each department/facility