

[Manitoba](#)

# Police called in after sand mining opponents blast RM of Springfield officials at meeting

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## Council meeting shut down before vote on changes that would allow processing plant in Manitoba municipality



[Bartley Kives](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 14, 2023 7:43 PM CDT | Last Updated: June 14



Springfield resident Allan Akins, right, speaks at an RM of Springfield council meeting. (Ernie Nathaniel/Interlace Media)

Anger over proposed sand mining in a southeastern Manitoba municipality boiled over at a Tuesday council meeting to the point where RCMP were called and advised elected officials to shut the session down.

The Rural Municipality of Springfield council meeting in Oakbank was adjourned in the presence of the Mounties, after residents expressed vociferous opposition to Calgary mining company Sio Silica's plans to build a sand-processing facility south of Vivian, a community about 50 kilometres east of Winnipeg.

"They can hang me for all I care, I am going to fight this to the end," one resident proclaimed during a meeting where Springfield's council was slated to vote on land-use changes that could allow the processing facility to proceed.

Sio Silica wants to drill up to 7,700 wells in southeastern Manitoba over 24 years in order to extract ultra-pure silica sand from a sandstone aquifer located 160 feet below the surface.

Its proposal awaits a recommendation from the provincial Clean Environment Commission, due by June 22, and then approval or denial from Environment and Climate Minister Kevin Klein.

***WATCH | Heated RM of Springfield council meeting:***



## **Fireworks at meeting on proposed silica processing facility**

18 hours ago

Duration 2:05

Residents of the RM of Springfield turned out at a special meeting Tuesday night to voice their concerns about a plan to mine silica sand in the area.

That decision, though, is separate from Springfield's deliberations over land-use changes that would allow the processing plant.

While Springfield's council originally balked at those changes, Manitoba's municipal board — a provincially appointed body with the [power to overturn decisions](#) made by elected officials — ordered the rural municipality to make the land-use changes.

- [An Alberta miner's proposal to drill 7,200 wells near Winnipeg has rural residents on edge](#)
- [Concerns mount in southeast Manitoba over proposed silica sand mining project near Vivian](#)

Springfield Mayor Patrick Therrien said his hands are tied by the municipal board, which was granted broader powers in 2021 by Manitoba's Progressive Conservative government.

"We have a court order from the municipal board and we have no choice but to do that," Therrien said Wednesday in an interview.

Attempts to get angry residents to hear council members out at Tuesday evening's meeting were in vain, he said.

"We're talking about a minority of people that were totally disruptive, and one individual was disruptive enough that we elected that he be removed," said Therrien.

"We closed the hearing down until the police would attend to remove this individual."

Three RCMP cruisers responded to the mayor's request.

An RCMP spokesperson said there was "conflict ... over a matter under discussion at the meeting," but by the time police arrived, "council had removed themselves and the residents had quieted."

Police advised the council to adjourn the meeting, RCMP spokesperson Tara Seel said in an emailed statement.

Nobody was arrested or ticketed, and police stayed on scene "to ensure no issues as the group of residents dispersed," she said.

## **Groundwater concerns**

Some Springfield residents, however, dispute Therrien's version of events.

Tangi Bell, who leads a group of residents opposed to Sio Silica's plans, alleged Springfield's council failed to follow its own rules and should have allowed residents to speak on the municipality's plans.

"They're not following the proper procedure and it was symbolic of that. There was calamity. They couldn't control the people. The people were asking relevant questions and council refused to answer," she said at her home north of Anola.



Tangi Bell is the president of Our Line in the Sand, a group of Sio Silica opponents who began organizing in 2020 against the mining proposal. (Travis Golby/CBC)

Most of the opposition to Sio Silica's plans stems from concern the mining activity could diminish the quality of groundwater in eastern Manitoba. The company insists its proposal will not impair the environment.

The conflict at Tuesday's council meeting led the Association of Manitoba Municipalities to repeat its opposition to the municipal board's new powers to flip decisions made by cities, towns and rural municipalities.

"Our position has remained consistent — we firmly oppose granting the unelected municipal board the authority to override decisions made by democratically elected officials at the local level. That's plain and simple," said association president Kam Blight, speaking by phone from the RM of Portage la Prairie.

A spokesperson for Municipal Relations Minister Andrew Smith did not directly address that concern, which is shared by Winnipeg Mayor Scott Gillingham and other municipal leaders.

- [Manitoba Municipal Board says Shaftesbury apartment complex should go ahead despite residents' concerns](#)
- [Municipal leaders present wish list to next provincial government](#)

The board was formed "to review appeals, applications and referrals as quickly as possible," Brant Batters said in a statement, and "configured to be an independent body" free of influence from government or municipalities.

Appeals are "fundamental to open and fair planning systems and are necessary for upholding transparent and accountable planning decisions," he said.