

City of Peterborough Site Alteration

2025 Application Guide

CITY OF PETERBOROUGH | 500 George St. N., Peterborough, ON K9H 3R9



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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide clear, step-by-step guidance for property owners, developers, and consultants applying for a Site Alteration Permit under the City of Peterborough's Site Alteration By-law No. 25-108. The By-law establishes a regulatory framework to govern activities that alter the physical characteristics of land, such as placing or removing fill and changing existing grades. These measures are necessary to protect environmental features, maintain proper drainage patterns, prevent erosion, and minimize impacts to surrounding properties and infrastructure.

What is a Site Alteration By-law?

A Site Alteration By-law is a municipal regulation enacted under the authority of the Municipal Act, 2001, and applicable conservation and planning legislation. It controls land-altering activities within municipal boundaries to ensure that development and landscaping work is carried out in a safe, sustainable, and coordinated manner.

In general, the By-law regulates the following activities:

- Removing/Placing fill
- Removing/Placing topsoil
- Altering the grade (elevation) of land

These activities may appear minor but can have significant consequences if not managed properly, such as:

- Disruption of natural drainage systems
- Increased flood risk or water pooling
- Sediment run off into stormwater systems or watercourses
- Loss of tree cover and other ecological functions
- Negative impacts to neighboring properties and public infrastructure.

Objectives of the Site Alteration By-law

The primary goals of the Site Alteration By-law are to:

- Protect the natural environment, including woodlands, wetlands, and other sensitive ecological features
- Preserve existing drainage patterns and minimize erosion
- Prevent adverse impacts to neighbouring properties and municipal infrastructure
- Ensure public safety and the structural stability of nearby buildings and slopes
- Support responsible development, particularly in areas undergoing intensification or redevelopment
- Align with Federal, Provincial and Conservation Authority policies and regulations.



What the By-law Does *Not* Regulate

The By-law is not intended to restrict routine residential landscaping activities that are minor in scale and do not pose drainage or environmental risks.

Permit exemptions typically include:

- Planting or maintaining gardens, flowerbeds, or lawns
- Topdressing or reseeding lawns
- Installing walkways, decks, patios, fences, or sheds
- Performing minor grade adjustments for landscape aesthetics

These activities are generally exempt provided that:

- The work does not obstruct drainage features, including swales or catch basins (stays 0.60m or 2 feet or more away from the feature)
- The total grade change is less than 0.15 metres (15 cm) and the total volume of fill imported or exported is less than 10 cubic metres
- No environmentally sensitive areas are affected
- The activity does not result in negative impacts to adjacent properties

If you are unsure whether your project requires a permit, you are encouraged to contact the City's Planning Division for clarification.

2.0 When is a Site Alteration Permit Required?

A Site Alteration Permit is required when proposed work exceeds specific thresholds or may interfere with drainage or environmental functions. These thresholds ensure that larger-scale or higher-risk activities are reviewed by City staff to prevent unintended impacts to neighbouring properties, natural systems, or municipal infrastructure.

2.1 Requirements

A permit is required when any of the following conditions apply:

- The volume of fill or soil exceeds 10 cubic metres, and the proposed alteration results in a grade change greater than 0.15 metres (15 cm or 6 inches) at any location on the site.
- The total disturbed area exceeds 500 square metres, and the proposed grade change is greater than 0.15 metres.
- The alteration involves or may result in obstruction, redirection, or modification of any existing drainage or conveyance feature. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Swales and ditches (engineered or natural)
 - Inlets, outlets, or catch basins
 - Culverts, flumes, or storm sewers
 - Natural watercourses such as wetlands, creeks or streams



- Roadsides with curbs, gutters, or other drainage infrastructure

Note: Even if a project does not exceed the volume or area thresholds, any alteration that obstructs or interferes with drainage may still require a permit.

Refer to **Table 1: Permit Categories (Section 3.0)** for a detailed breakdown of thresholds, permit types, and associated requirements based on project size and risk level.

2.2 Exemptions

The Site Alteration By-law includes a number of exemptions for routine or low-risk activities that do not require a permit, provided specific conditions are met.

A permit is not required if the site alteration activity:

- Involves less than 10 cubic metres of total cut and/or fill
- Disturbs less than 500 square metres of area
- Results in no grade changes greater than 0.15 metres
- Is located at least 0.60 metres (2 feet) away from any drainage swale, easement, or property boundary used for drainage
- Does not interfere with or redirect any natural or artificial drainage features
- Does not cause water ponding, erosion, or impacts to adjacent lands or infrastructure

Additional exemptions apply to the following:

- Site alteration that forms part of a development application approved under the Planning Act, such as a plan of subdivision, site plan, or consent (severance)
- Work carried out under a valid permit or order issued by the City's Chief Building Official
- Site alteration undertaken pursuant to an administrative order issued by the City (e.g., grading or compliance orders)
- Operations within licensed pits or quarries governed by the Aggregate Resources Act
- Drain construction or maintenance carried out under the Drainage Act or Tile Drainage Act
- Normal agricultural practices, including tilling, seeding, harvesting, or topsoil removal incidental to crop production

Note: Stripping or relocating topsoil for resale or construction site preparation may not qualify as normal agricultural activity and could require a permit.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with the City's Infrastructure and Planning Services Division before commencing any work to confirm whether a permit is required. This helps to avoid unintentional non-compliance with the By-law or other applicable regulations. For a complete list of exemptions, definitions, and conditions, refer to the City of Peterborough Site Alteration By-law No. 25-108.



2.3 Key Considerations for Residential Property Site Alterations

What is a Swale?

A swale is a shallow, gently sloping channel designed to manage surface water runoff. Most homes in Peterborough and across Ontario rely on rear and side yard swales to:

- Prevent water pooling or flooding
- Direct water to catch basins, storm sewers, or natural features
- Protect neighbouring properties from runoff

IMAGE 1: SIDE YARD SWALE



Why You Should Not Alter Swales

Altering or obstructing swales intentionally or unintentionally can lead to:

- Flooding of adjacent yards
- Basement water infiltration
- Erosion or property damage
- Enforcement action or permit violations



Swales must remain continuous, unobstructed, and at original grade or approved slope. Any changes near swales must maintain flow and may require a formal grading plan reviewed by the City depending on the complexity of the project.

Best Practices When Planning Site Work:

- Maintain at least **0.60m (2 feet)** clearance from all swales (typically located along property lines or on or near fence lines).
- If work must occur near a swale, hire a qualified professional to assess slope and flow.
- Never fill in a swale or reroute drainage without City approval.
- Consider your neighbours downstream drainage is a shared responsibility.

3.0 Site Alteration Classification

TABLE 1: PERMIT CATEGORIES

Category	Volume	Area	Grade Change	Examples
Exempt	Less than 10 m ³	Less than 500 m ²	Less than 0.15 m	Gardening, topdressing
Minor Alteration	10–30 m ³	Up to 500 m ²	Greater than 0.15 m	Pool installation, landscaping
Intermediate	30–500 m ³	500–5,000 m ²	Any	Parking lot construction, commercial
Major	Greater than 500 m ³	Greater than 5,000 m ²	Any	Subdivisions, large development sites

Note: Exemptions also apply to certain activities under provincial legislation (e.g., Drainage Act, Aggregate Resources Act, Planning Act approvals).



3.1 Minor Alteration

Minor Alteration includes the cut volume, import or export of 10m³ to 30m³ of material and a change in the elevation of the land greater than 150mm in an area 500m² or less. Submission requirements to obtain a permit would be limited and may include a grading plan.

Examples:

- Full backyard landscape retrofit
- Home additions

How to Prepare a Simple Site Sketch for Minor Alterations

Not all minor applications (e.g., backyard patios, small landscaping projects) do not require full engineered drawings, but a simple, scaled site sketch is required.

What to Include in the Sketch:

- General property lines and building footprints
- Proposed alteration (e.g., concrete patio, landscaping area)
- Existing features (swales, catch basins, retaining walls, decks, fences)
- Proposed general grade/elevation changes represented in metres if changing slope or adding/removing fill (e.g. +/-0.30m)
- Distances to property lines and buildings represented in metres.
- North arrow and scale (e.g., 1:100)

Example Scenario – Backyard Concrete Patio

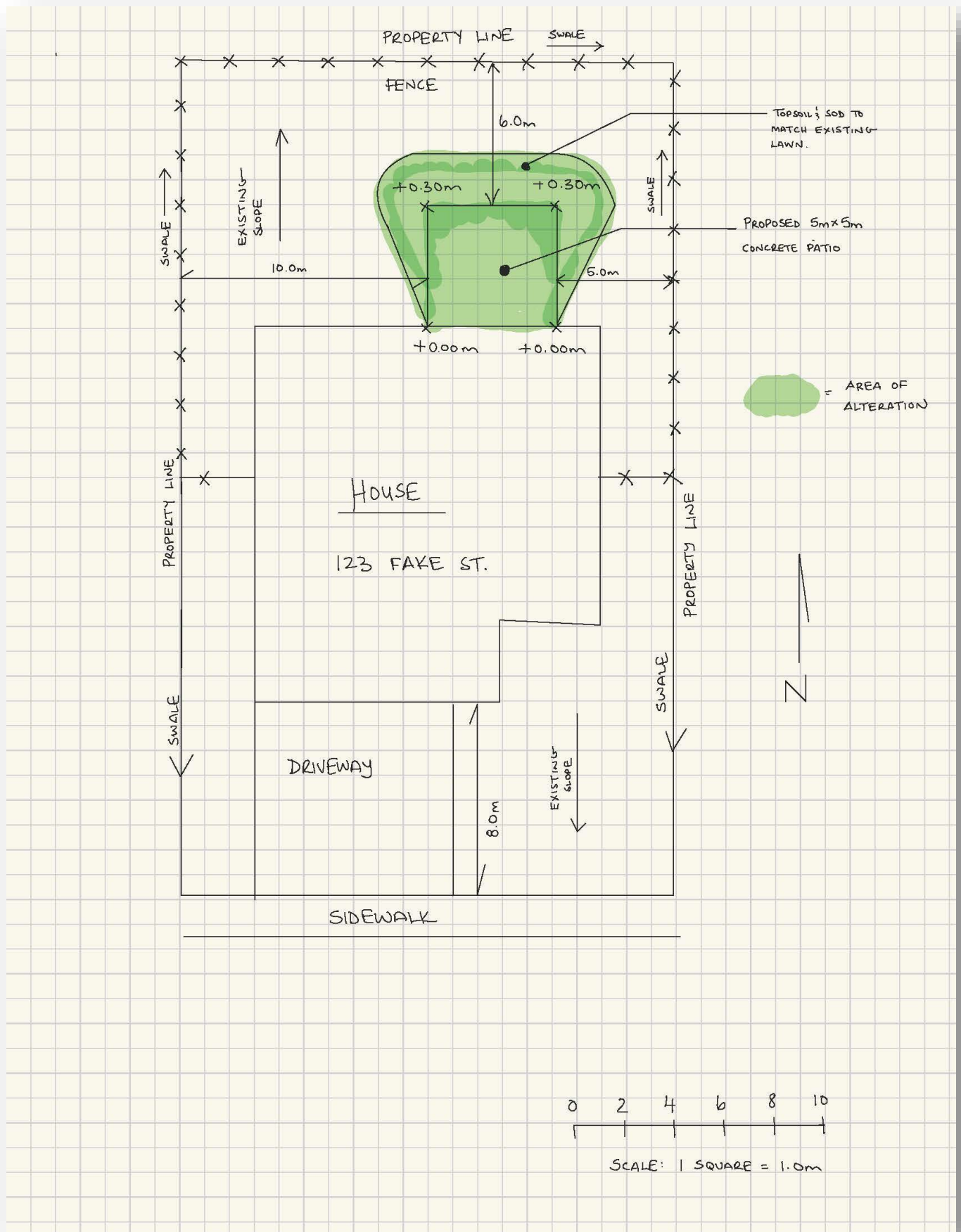
If you're installing a 5.0m x 5.0m concrete patio:

- Show the patio dimensions and its location relative to your house and lot lines.
- Identify any nearby swales and ensure at least 0.6m setback.
- If changing grade (e.g., using gravel or raising surface), note the new elevation compared to existing (e.g. +/- 0.30m or 0.00m if matching existing elevation)
- Indicate the direction of water flow — ensure it drains away from the home and towards designated drainage areas.

Tip: Use graph paper or a digital drawing tool. Attach recent survey or grading plan, if available, to support your sketch.



IMAGE 2: EXAMPLE MINOR ALTERATION SKETCH



3.2 Intermediate Alteration

Intermediate Alteration includes change of grade greater than 150mm and the cut volume and import or export of 30m³ to 500m³ of material or an area of alteration between 500m² to 5,000m².

Note: there are special instances in which intermediate volumes can be treated as a minor application (e.g. filling in a pool) please contact staff to confirm.

Submission requirements include a design brief, soil characterization report, grading plans, erosion control plans in accordance with the City's **ENGINEERING DESIGN STANDARDS** as well as applicable security fees.

Please refer to **Table 2: Permit Submission Requirements**.

Examples:

- Commercial Development
- Parking Lots

Note: permit requirements would only be required for projects where an agreement under the Planning Act is not obtained.

3.3 Major Alteration

Major Alteration includes the cut volume and import or export of greater than 500m³ of material or an area of alteration greater than 5,000m².

Submission requirements would be similar in scope to those required for site plan or subdivision approval and include geotechnical and hydrogeological studies, grading plans, erosion control plans, identification of haul routes and mitigative measures, insurance certificates, stormwater management reports and design briefs in accordance with the City's **ENGINEERING DESIGN STANDARDS**.

Please refer to **Table 2: Permit Submission Requirements**

Example:

- Residential Development

Note: permits are only required for projects where an agreement under the Planning Act is not yet obtained.



4.0 Application Process Overview

4.1 Step 1 – Pre-Consultation (Optional but Recommended)

Contact the City’s Planning and Development Services Department to confirm if your project requires a permit under the Site Alteration By-law.

4.2 Step 2 – Prepare Application Package (Typical)

Property owner or their designates are to prepare application package. The following table includes the general application requirement by permit type.

TABLE 2: PERMIT SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Submission Item	Minor	Intermediate	Major
Completed Online Application	✓	✓	✓
Grading Plan	✓	✓	✓
Sediment & Erosion Control Plan	✗	✓	✓
Soil Characterization Report	✗	✓	✓
Design Brief	✗	✓	✓
Stormwater Management Report	✗	✗	✓
Haul Route Plan (if applicable)	✗	✗	✓
Security Deposit (if applicable)	✗	✓	✓
Insurance Certificate	✗	✗	✓

Note: additional document submissions may be required per the Managers discretion to meet specific project conditions and requirements including but not limited to proof of permits and approvals required from other entities. All submissions requirements shall meet or exceed the **CITY’S ENGINEERING AND DESIGN STANDARDS**.



4.3 Step 3 – Submit Application Online

Click [HERE](#) to register an online application account. Then proceed with the following:

- Select Site Alteration By-Law Application

The screenshot shows a web interface titled "Apply For Development Application". Under the heading "Choose Planning Application Type", there are eight application options arranged in two rows. The first row includes: Pre-Consultation (Stage 1), Pre-Consultation (Stage 2) Technical Adequacy Review, Site Plan Approval, Minor Variance or Permission Application, Consent or Severance Application, and Part Lot Control Exemption. The second row includes: SPC - Minor Site Plan Approval, Site Alteration By-Law Application - SAB (highlighted with a red box and a red arrow), Missing Middle Community Improvement Plan (MCIP), and Official Plan Amendment.

- Confirm the conditions of your project require a permit by reviewing the disclosure questionnaire

The screenshot shows a progress bar with five steps: 1. Disclosure, 2. Application Type, 3. Permit Details, 4. Project Information, and 5. Documents. The "Disclosure" step is active. Below the progress bar, the text reads: "You are about to submit an Application for a Site Alteration By-law Permit. Before you continue, please ensure the following:" followed by a list of requirements. At the bottom, a question asks "Do you meet all of the above requirements? *". The "Yes" radio button is selected, and the "No" radio button is unselected. A "Next" button is visible in the bottom right corner.

- Provide some general information related to your project including the address, the permit type you are applying for and a description of the work and why you believe it requires a permit.

The screenshot shows a form titled "New Consent Application". It includes a legend: "*indicates required field". Under "Steps:", there are three instructions: 1. You can search for the address using one of the 2 options: 1) Simple 2) Advanced; 2. In the Simple mode, type the address in the address field and choose the address from the drop down list; 3. In the Advanced mode, fill all or some of the fields in the form and click Search. Choose the address from the result table. There are two radio buttons for "Simple" (selected) and "Advanced". The "Address *" field contains "123 Fake St.". The "Permit Type *" dropdown menu is set to "Minor - volume between 10m3 and 30m3 OR Area <500m2". The "Description of consent being requested *" text area contains "Installing a 5x5 concrete patio in backyard, elevation change of proposed work will exceed 0.15m, will be excavating out more than 10m3 of topsoil and replacing with compacted sand base material." A "Next" button is at the bottom right.



- Provide a confirmation that you have read this guidance document, the estimated area of disturbance in m², the proposed dates of the project and the estimated earth to be moved (includes import and export of material as well as relocation of material on the property

- Please upload the required documents as outlined in this guidance document (see **Table 2: Permit Submission Requirements**). In addition, you are welcome to include any supplementary materials that may assist with the review such as photos, landscaper information, or Google Maps views.

Note: Once you have selected the appropriate files, be sure to click **“Upload All”** in the bottom-right corner

- Review and click the Final Acknowledgement and declaration page and click **“Submit”**.
- At this point staff will review the initial application, confirm the permit category, and respond back with additional application instructions/requirements if required and the request for payment.



5.0 Fees

5.1 General Site Alteration Fees

TABLE 3: FEES

Category	Base Fee	Per Hectare Rate	Per Hectare Cap
Minor	\$300	N/A	N/A
Intermediate	\$1,000	\$1,000	N/A
Major	\$1,500	\$1,000	\$20,000

Major Alteration Example:

Disturbed Area: 15ha (15,000m²)

Export Volume: 100m³

$\$1500$ (base fee) + $\$1000 \times 15\text{ha}$ (per hectare rate) = $\$16,500$

Note: The site alteration permitting process is not intended to duplicate development fees. If an owner chooses to proceed with earth-moving operations prior to obtaining development approvals, fees collected through a site alteration permit will be deducted from the fees associated with grading and erosion control at the time of development approval, since these works would already have been completed under the site alteration permit.

5.2 Security Deposit

The City reserves the right to request a security deposit based on site-specific conditions. The amount of the deposit will be determined by the City following a review of the scope of work and will reflect the cost of grading and erosion control measures necessary to stabilize the site in the event the owner abandons the project. The security deposit will be returned upon satisfactory completion and stabilization of the project, at the discretion of the City of Peterborough inspector.



6.0 Permit Conditions & Duration

6.1 Conditions

All permit holders must be:

- In compliance with the By-law and other applicable laws.
- Following erosion and sediment control requirements. As per CP805.01 (**PETERBOROUGH STANDARD SPECIFICATIONS**)
- Notifying the City of Peterborough in the event of any changes in project scope.

6.2 Duration

Permit **valid for 1 year**, unless otherwise stipulated. If the duration of the site alteration exceeds 1 year the permit holder must renew or resubmit their permit application.

7.0 Enforcement and Penalties

It is the responsibility of the property owner to meet by-law and permit requirements. In cases where a permit is required, applications shall be made and permit conditions will be provided by City staff.

If it is determined that a contravention of this By-law has occurred the by-law officer may:

- Issue an administrative order requiring the person who contravened the by-law to discontinue the contravening activity and make an order requiring the person to do work to correct the contravention at the person's expense.
- If the corrective orders are not addressed or properly appealed the person is subject to administrative penalties in accordance with the AMP System By-law 20-073.

Full details related to enforcement can be found within the draft by-law document.

Failure to obtain a permit or to follow permit conditions may result in:

- Administrative Orders to stop and correct the activity
- Fines under the **AMP SYSTEM BY-LAW 20-073**
- \$500–\$750/day (no permit)
- \$175–\$275/day (other contraventions)
- Additional penalties upon conviction: up to \$50,000 for repeated offence.



8.0 Appeals

What can be appealed:

Applicants may appeal the following decisions made under the by-law:

- **Permit refusals** (if staff deny a permit application)
- **Permit conditions** (if conditions are seen as unreasonable or overly restrictive)
- **Permit revocations** (if a permit is cancelled due to non-compliance or misrepresentation)
- **Administrative Orders** (such as stop-work orders, compliance orders, or restoration requirements)

To appeal a matter related to the Site Alteration By-law please visit the [TICKETS, FINES AND PROVINCIAL OFFENCES COURT PAGE](#) on the City's website.

9.0 Contacts

For additional guidance, please contact the City's Planning Department:

City Hall
500 George St. N
Peterborough ON
K9H 3R9
Phone: 705-742-7777 ext. 1880
PLANNING@PETERBOROUGH.CA

