

## Citizen Town Hall – Host Summary

My name is James Bisson, and I was the host of the Citizen Town Hall. I want to thank everyone who came out for the event and especially those could not enter the meeting room. The capacity was quickly maxed, and it was determined by management of the hotel that letting anyone else in would be considered a fire hazard. I would like to apologize for the Facebook Livestream and technical issues experienced.

I also want to thank the individuals who assisted in promoting the event. There was about a dozen or so people who were involved, but their role was strictly promotional. One individual was incredibly supportive, and I can't thank her enough for her engagement. It was a sincere pleasure collaborating with her. All volunteers asked not to be named for privacy reasons. I agreed to be the face of the meeting and assumed full responsibility for the outcome.

Those gathered were a cross section of our community: men and women, young people and seniors, politicians and voters, advocates and antagonists, business owners and employees, those of means and the homeless. The only common factor was a deep-rooted concern of the state of our community. I had been warned of potential disruption and had heard from enough people to know that some were ready to take matters into their own hands. There was no seating arrangement and there was no telling who sat next to who. I was very concerned about security and not having things get out of hand.

I began by introducing myself and laying the ground rules. I tried to make sure that we found common ground and a common goal. I spoke about a time when our country almost broke during the last Quebec Referendum and how despite the intensity of the moment, peaceful acceptance of the results prevailed. I told the crowd my deep appreciation for what Cobourg meant to me and how in gratitude for teaching me what community meant, I would fight for our town not to lose our unique identity. I devised a voting system to get the people in the room to participate in the process but refused to allow open comments to avoid conflict. To those 2 individuals out of the hundreds that were there that spoke out, my sincerest apologies for being rude.

I have uploaded the content of the presentation for your review. As I had not had the time to run it through or script my comments, everyone including myself saw and heard the presentation for the first time. I have an idea of what I said, but the exact way I said it and the way it was received by each person present is uncertain. I was speaking as an individual concerned about our community and not as an elected representative or person in authority. If I said things deemed offensive to some/most, it was not my intention. The goal was to bring everyone to see the other side of the argument. I tried to remain unbiased and present the facts for everyone to avoid the extremes and move towards a common compromise.

Although many were critical of me and considered it a waste of time, I have concluded that it was the best presentation I ever failed! I invited hundreds of my neighbours to meet on a very charged subject and we all left in peace. I am incredibly proud of every single person that was there (and those that were there but not in the room) that they care about their town, that they want to make it right, and that even sitting next to someone who is totally opposed to their beliefs, were responsible enough to allow each other the freedom to express themselves without recourse.

To be perfectly honest, the days since the event have been tumultuous. I'm not on social media so I was not, nor am I aware of the content. I find it a little strange that so many support a company that is in conflict with our government about funding Canadian content, but that's another issue. I assumed that many took the items they felt were wrong and ran with them. From what I've been told, the backlash was profound. I was concerned about my personal safety and that of my family, so we stayed out of sight for several days just in case.

I have since walked in my neighborhood and around town without incident. I still smile and say hello to passersby and for the most part get a pleasant response. I spoke to a neighbor and asked if she had heard about the event, and she said no. I asked her if she felt better now that Battell was shuttered and she said, "Oh yes!". I was disappointed to inform her that the people that were there are in the encampment and the problem isn't solved but shifted. She said that's not right, and we should do something about that.... typical response from a neighbor in Cobourg!

I have no doubt that the community I belong to can come together to solve the complex issues that face us all. I strongly believe that if the tide is to turn, it is in Cobourg. If there is one place where we can solve this homeless and addiction crisis that is sweeping our communities, if there is one place where individual citizens, business owners, community organizations and governments of all levels can put a plan in place and get it done, it is here. It will take time, effort, organization, and resources to do it, but I believe there's something to feel good about. I hope you do too!

All the best!

James Bisson