

## Participation is necessary to make better communities:

Residents hope to see more community members at quarterly Town Hall meetings

In 2023, Mayor Lisa Post established the quarterly Town Hall meetings, aiming to bridge the gap that often exists between a municipality and its residents through connection and productive conversations.

It's more than just the Mayor and Town that are passionate about these meetings; residents who have attended have also spoken about wanting to see more of the community engaged and attending.

"It's a wonderful vehicle for residents to understand what is going on in this community," said Lisa Shulist, who has attended three of the four previous meetings. "It's an opportunity for residents to have a voice and to ask specific, burning questions that may have been on their mind."

Shulist would like to see more residents attend the meetings, which she notes have a good format for allowing resident involvement.

"Mayor Post does a great job at maintaining control over the Town Hall so that everyone has an opportunity to share at least one burning question they have," she said. "She's really clearly stated the ground rules, making it a fair game for everyone."

Since moving to Orangeville, Shulist has started to pay much more attention to what goes on in her community than she did where she lived previously. Part of what drew her to attend the Town Halls in the first place, she noted, was Mayor

Post's openness and willingness to open this additional line of communication between the Town and the municipality.

"Mayor Post's values are obvious; she believes in what she is doing," said Shulist. "This is just another arm of allowing the community to see how open and real she is."

Mike Chapman has attended every Town Hall meeting so far, often taking the opportunity to speak up at the meetings, asking questions and raising concerns.

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"It's critically important to understand that municipal government affects everything we do every day," said Chapman. "It's not just garbage collection, it's zoning bylaws, stop signs, looking into doctors and how we find health care. It goes far beyond what we see as residents on the surface."

He described the informal nature of the meetings as Mayor Post 'pulling the curtain back' to help the community see what might be missed by the public, and to meet the Town Staff that are doing the often-unseen work.

"It's a lot of work to run a municipality, and these are dedicated people who really want to do a good job," Chapman said. "They want to engage with this

community and understand its needs and understand how we can make life better in this Town."

The meetings usually include at least four members of Town Staff on the panel, who are available to answer questions directly during the Q&A, unlike the more formal council meetings where questions are directed to the Mayor.

Another point Chapman made, which Shulist echoed, is that the Mayor and Council are reactive in a good way – they listen to what the residents are asking and work to bring in the people who can answer those questions at future meetings.

In the past year, the Hills of Headwaters Collaborative Ontario Health Team attended to address physician recruitment and Dufferin OPP spoke to

safety, speeding, and other community concerns.

"These meetings are a question of trust," Chapman added. "The ability for us to sit in front of Council members and Town Staff and be able to understand they are really doing the best they can. And they are engaging with the community to find out what matters to them."

For Shulist, one of the draws of these meetings is that they're an important part of creating positive change, and the responsibility to do so extends to members of the community.

"If you want to make a community better, you have to participate," said Shulist.

The next public Town Hall meeting will be held on May 15 at the Tony Rose Memorial Sports Centre at 6:30 p.m.



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