

## 5 Surprising Lessons from Three Decades of Cobourg Elections

Local elections are often dismissed as predictable, low-stakes affairs where the same names rotate through the same chairs. However, the data tells a far more volatile story. By treating the town's electoral history from 1994 to 2022 as a political laboratory, we uncover a high-stakes landscape defined by razor-thin margins and long-term endurance. This 28-year dataset reveals that while Cobourg often feels like an impenetrable fortress for those in power, the foundation of that power is sometimes held together by fewer votes than it takes to fill a single dinner table.

### 1. The Incumbency Fortress (An 88% Success Rate)

The single most dominant trend in Cobourg's municipal governance is the overwhelming statistical advantage held by sitting members of Council. According to the "Incumbency Summary," when an established official seeks re-election, they aren't just favored, they are nearly a mathematical certainty.

Out of 24 recorded incumbent runs within the dataset, 21 resulted in a victory. This 88% success rate suggests that the most difficult part of Cobourg politics is the initial entry; once a candidate is inside the "fortress," they are remarkably difficult to dislodge. This dominance is perhaps best exemplified by the ultimate electoral shield: the acclamation. In 2003, Peter Delanty's Mayoral run was so dominant that he won without a single opponent, a feat mirrored by A.D. McCurdy's 1994 Deputy Mayor win.

**Analytical Reflection:** An 88%-win rate indicates that incumbency provides a level of electoral security that transcends individual policy platforms, effectively creating a barrier to entry that only three challengers have successfully breached in the analyzed cycles.

### 2. Every Single Vote Actually Does Count: The Bureau-Burchat Threshold

While politicians often use the cliché that "every vote counts" to bolster turnout, Cobourg's history provides the cold, hard data to prove it. The margins of victory in recent years reveal a startling fragility in political mandates, where the decision of a few households can change the town's entire electoral trajectory.

In the 2022 Mayoral race, Lucas Cleveland unseated incumbent John Henderson by a mere 105 votes (3,391 vs 3,286). However, the absolute peak of statistical significance occurred in the 2018 Councillor race. We can call this the "Bureau-Burchat Threshold": Aaron Burchat secured his seat with 3,065 votes, while Adam Bureau followed with 3,060. A margin of just five votes determined the ranking and momentum of two of the town's most prominent current figures.

**Electoral Insight:** In 2018, the difference between the fourth and fifth-place council seats was a mere five votes, proving that municipal power in Cobourg can hinge on the turnout of a single apartment building.

### 3. The "Golden Era" of Vote Totals vs. Modern Polarization

Comparing historical vote totals reveals a shift in the nature of Cobourg's political mandates. The year 2000 stands out as a "golden era" for raw vote counts. That year, Deputy Mayor Bob Spooner reached a peak of 5,283 votes, and Peter Delanty won the Mayoralty with 5,068 votes—figures that

remain untouched by modern candidates. By comparison, the 2022 high-water mark for a Councillor was Adam Bureau with 4,111 votes.

While this might appear to be a simple decline in engagement, the "Competition & Vote Share Analysis" suggests a deeper shift toward polarization. In 2000, Peter Delanty won a two-candidate race with a massive 70.1% of the vote share. In 2022, the Mayoral race was also a head-to-head contest, yet Lucas Cleveland captured just 50.8% of the vote. This suggests that modern winners governing with much narrower consensus than their predecessors at the turn of the millennium.

**Statistical Reflection:** Despite a growing population, modern Mayoral mandates have become significantly more divided; a 70% landslide has been replaced by a 50.8% "coin-flip" victory, indicating a more polarized electorate.

#### **4. Political Careerism and the Value of Persistence**

Cobourg's political landscape rewards the "long game," but that path is rarely a straight line. We see a clear pattern of political careerism in figures like Gil Brocanier, whose electoral trajectory followed a textbook climb: starting as a Councillor in 2003, moving to Deputy Mayor in 2006, and eventually serving as Mayor for two terms (2010 and 2014).

However, the most surprising lesson in persistence comes from Miriam Mutton. Her data reveals a rare "downward" mobility that eventually led back to success. After winning Councillor seats in 2006 and 2010, she lost a bid for Mayor in 2014 and a bid for Councillor in 2018. Rather than exiting the arena, she returned in 2022 to reclaim a Councillor seat. This 16-year cycle of winning, losing, and returning highlights a unique brand of political endurance. Similarly, Johnny Percolides has maintained a steady presence across the 2014, 2018, and 2022 cycles, demonstrating that in Cobourg, the desire to participate in the process often outlasts a single election result.

**Analytical Reflection:** Political longevity in Cobourg is not always about a continuous climb; Miriam Mutton's career shows that the "Incumbency Fortress" can be lost and eventually rebuilt through persistent re-engagement.

#### **5. The Year of the Crowded Ballot: Efficiency in 1994**

The dynamics of power change drastically when the size of the candidate pool fluctuates. The 1994 election remains the historical benchmark for electoral congestion, featuring 16 candidates for Councillor seats. This stands in stark contrast to the 9 or 10 candidates seen in the 2018 and 2022 cycles.

The 1994 data reveals a lesson in "electoral efficiency." With such a crowded field, the vote share required to win a seat plummeted due to extreme vote-splitting. Tony Farren was the top vote-getter for Councillor in 1994, yet he won with a mere 11.9% of the total vote share. This suggests that in a crowded field, a candidate does not need broad town-wide consensus to win; they simply need a highly loyal, niche base. As the field narrows in modern years, the "efficiency" of winning has decreased, requiring candidates to appeal to a larger percentage of the town to secure a seat.

**Statistical Reflection:** In 1994, the 11.9% "efficiency threshold" allowed winners to emerge from a fractured field of 16, whereas modern candidates face a more consolidated—and thus more competitive—path to victory.

## **Conclusion: The Future of the Cobourg Ballot**

For nearly three decades, the "Incumbency Fortress" has been the defining characteristic of Cobourg's municipal governance. However, the 2022 election provided a rare shock to the system. The simultaneous unseating of an incumbent Mayor (John Henderson) and an incumbent Deputy Mayor (Suzanne Seguin) represents a significant crack in the historical 88% success rate.

As we look toward the next cycle, the data serves as a stark reminder of the power of the individual. In a town where the "Bureau-Burchat Threshold" of five votes can decide a council seat, the statistical reality is clear: no incumbent is truly safe, and no resident can afford to stay home on election day.