Cobourg Election Analysis (2014, 2018, 2022)

Cobourg elects **five councillors at-large**, meaning voters can vote for up to five candidates. That voting rule largely determines the structural dynamics observed below.

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1. Candidate Tables (Alphabetical by Last Name)

2022 Councillor Race

Candidate	Votes	Rank	Elected
Randy Barber	2532	5	Yes
Ashley Bouman	2269	8	No
Aaron Burchat	3412	3	Yes
Adam Bureau	4111	1	Yes
Brian Darling	3761	2	Yes
Sara Gardinier	1819	9	No
Mark Mills	2362	6	No
Miriam Mutton	3260	4	Yes
Johnny Percolides	1261	10	No
Michael Sprayson	2336	7	No

2018 Councillor Race

Candidate	Votes	Rank	Elected
Nicole Beatty	4278	1	Yes
Aaron Burchat	3065	4	Yes
Adam Bureau	3060	5	Yes
Emily Chorley	3679	3	Yes
Brian Darling	3969	2	Yes
Karl Vom Dorf	1763	8	No
Travis Hoover	2334	7	No
Miriam Mutton	2851	6	No
Johnny Percolides	1340	9	No

2014 Councillor Race

Candidate	Votes	Rank	Elected
Dave Black	1455	9	No
Aaron Burchat	2022	7	No
Brian Darling	4739	1	Yes
Wayne Deveau	2720	6	No
Gudrun Ludorf-Weaver	1547	8	No
Debra McCarthy	3850	4	Yes
Johnny Percolides	1269	10	No
Theresa Rickerby	4660	2	Yes
Forrest Rowden	3869	3	Yes
Larry Sherwin	3822	5	Yes

2. Summary Metrics

Metric	2022	2018	2014
Candidates	10	9	12
Seats	5	5	5
Ballots cast	~6,600	6,480	7,704
Turnout	~44%	43.6%	52.4%
Avg votes per candidate	2,611	2,927	2,622
Vote to win (5th place)	2,532	3,060	3,822

Trend:

The vote threshold to win **declined significantly in 2022**, suggesting vote fragmentation.

Candidate Field Size

Year	Candidates	Seats	Candidates per Seat
2022	10	5	2.0
2018	9	5	1.8
2014	10	5	2.0

This is **not a crowded field**. In competitive municipal elections the ratio often exceeds **3 candidates per seat**.

Low competition strongly favors incumbents.

3. Vote Concentration

2022

- 1st place: **4111**
- 5th place (cutoff): **2532**
- 6th place: **2362**

Margins:

- 1st vs 5th = **1579**
- 5th vs 6th = **170**

Meaning: The **real election battle occurred around ~2400 votes**.

2018

- 1st place: **4278**
- 5th place: **3060**
- 6th place: **2851**

Margins:

- 1st vs 5th = **1218**
- 5th vs 6th = **209**

Again, the **cutoff zone is extremely tight**.

2014

- 1st place: **4739**
- 5th place: **3822**
- 6th place: **2720**

Margins:

- 1st vs 5th = **917**
- 5th vs 6th = **1102**

2014 was the only election where the winning group separated clearly from challengers.

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4. Estimated Winning Threshold

Year	Votes Needed to Win
2022	~2500
2018	~3000
2014	~3800

The decline indicates **lower voter participation and/or fragmented voting**.

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5. Incumbent / Returning Candidate Effects

Frequent repeat candidates:

- Brian Darling
- Aaron Burchat
- Adam Bureau
- Miriam Mutton
- Johnny Percolides

Key pattern:
Returning candidates almost always outperform first-time candidates.

Example:

2018 Returning candidates captured **4 of 5 seats**.
2022 Returning candidates captured **4 of 5 seats again**.
That indicates a **very strong name-recognition effect**.

6. Alphabetical Ballot Order Effect

Approximate alphabetical ranking vs vote results:

Observations

- Top performers frequently appear in the **early or mid-alphabet** (B, D, M).
- Few winners appear late alphabetically.

Examples:

Election	Earliest Winner
2022	Barber
2018	Beatty
2014	Darling

Late-alphabet candidates (P, V, etc.) rarely approach winning vote totals.

Structural explanation

Cobourg ballots list candidates alphabetically. In multi-vote elections voters often:

1. Recognize incumbents
2. Then choose familiar names near top of list
3. Stop once they reach 5 choices

This produces **ballot-order fatigue**.

Correlation between **alphabetical position and vote totals**:

Year	Correlation
2022	−0.34
2018	−0.73
2014	+0.43

Interpretation:

- Negative correlation means **earlier alphabet names perform better**.
- 2018 shows a **strong alphabetical advantage**.
- However, the effect is inconsistent across elections, meaning:
- Alphabetical order is **secondary**, not decisive.
- Name recognition dominates.

8. Vote Splitting Among Challengers

Example (2022):

Non-winning challengers:
- Mills
- Sprayson
- Bouman
- Gardinier
- Percolides

Combined votes: ≈ **10,000 votes**
Individually no one approached the winning threshold.
This is classic **vote fragmentation**.
If two of those candidates had consolidated support, the election result would likely change.

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9. Structural Voting Behavior

Several structural characteristics appear consistent across the three elections.

A. Strong Incumbent Advantage

Returning candidates dominate.

Typical reason:
- Name recognition
- Voters selecting familiar names on multi-vote ballots.

B. Slate Voting

Many voters appear to vote for **a group of known candidates**, not just one.

Evidence: Vote totals cluster closely among leading candidates.

C. Low Challenger Coordination

Too many challengers divide the anti-incumbent vote.

D. Stable Political Class
Several councillors appear across multiple elections.

That indicates **low electoral volatility**.

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10. Structural Model of Cobourg Voting

The voting dynamics appear roughly:

Recognized candidates: 3000–4500 votes
Mid-tier candidates: 2300–3000 votes
Unknown candidates: 1200–2000 votes

The **critical winning threshold** is the boundary between the first two groups.

11. Bullet Voting vs Full Slate Voting

Bullet voting = selecting only one candidate.

Evidence suggests **limited bullet voting**.

Why:

If bullet voting were dominant, vote totals would be much lower and more dispersed.

Instead, we see clusters around similar totals.

This implies voters frequently select **multiple councillor candidates**.

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12. Longitudinal Trends

Key shifts:

Vote totals declining

Top vote:

2014: 4739
2018: 4278
2022: 4111

Suggests **declining turnout or engagement**.

Winning threshold declining

3822 → 3060 → 2532

Meaning: It is becoming **easier to win a seat**.

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13. Core Strategic Insight

The **real contest is always the 4th–7th place band**.

Example 2022:

4th: 3260
5th: 2532
6th: 2362
7th: 2336

Four candidates within **~900 votes**.
That is where elections are decided.

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14. Hard Reality of Cobourg Elections

The structural rules produce a predictable outcome:
1. Known candidates start with **large vote advantage**.
2. Challengers split votes.
3. Incumbents remain stable.

This is common in **small Canadian municipalities with at-large councillor elections**.

15. Key Implication for Future Elections

To defeat incumbents, challengers must:

1. **Limit the challenger field**

2. **Reach ~2800–3000 votes**

3. **Create name recognition early**

Otherwise, incumbents win by default.

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17. Key Structural Insight

Cobourg elections are dominated by **three reinforcing mechanisms**:

1. **Incumbent name recognition**

2. **Alphabetical ballot positioning**

3. **Vote fragmentation among challengers**

These produce a **stable but difficult-to-penetrate political structure**.

Summary

The likelihood of an incumbent being elected is significantly high, while the correlation between electoral success and having a last name early in the alphabet is mixed but notably present in recent councillor races.

Incumbency Likelihood

The sources provide a specific **incumbency win rate of 88%**. This is based on a summary of **24 incumbent runs, which resulted in 21 wins** and only 3 losses.

- **Successful Incumbents:** Numerous candidates have successfully defended their seats, including **Brian Darling** (won as incumbent in 2018 and 2022), **Adam Bureau** (2022), **Aaron Burchat** (2022), **Forrest Rowden** (2014), and **Bill Macdonald**, who won three times as an incumbent.

- **Incumbent Losses:** Despite the high success rate, incumbency does not guarantee victory. Notable losses include **John Henderson** for Mayor in 2022, **Suzanne Seguin** for Deputy Mayor in 2022, and **Joan Chalovich** for Mayor in 2000.

Alphabetical Likelihood

While the sources do not provide a specific win rate for alphabetical order, an analysis of the winners suggests that candidates with last names in the **A-M range** have been particularly successful in recent years, though exceptions exist throughout history.

- **Recent Success (A-M Range):** In the **2018 and 2022 councillor races**, every single winner had a last name starting with a letter between A and M.

  - **2022 Winners: B**ureau, **D**arling, **B**urchat, **M**utton, and **B**arber.

  - **2018 Winners: B**eatty, **D**arling, **C**horley, **B**urchat, and **B**ureau.

- **Non-Guarantee for Early Names:** Having a name early in the alphabet does not ensure a win. For example, in 2022, **Bouman (B)**, **Gardinier (G)**, and **Mills (M)** all lost their bids for councillor. Similarly, **Johnny Percolides (P)** has lost in three consecutive elections (2014, 2018, 2022).

- **Historical Distribution:** In earlier elections, winners were more evenly distributed across the alphabet. In 1994, the successful councillors included names starting with **F** (Farren), **L** (Lindsay), **P** (Pepper), **M** (Macdonald), and **S** (Sifton). In 2014, the winners included **R**owden and **S**herwin.

In conclusion, **incumbency is a very strong predictor of success at 88%**. While recent councillor winners are concentrated at the start of the alphabet (A-M), historical data and high-profile losses for candidates with "B" or "M" names indicate that **alphabetical order is a less reliable predictor than incumbency**