

My name is Alexander Bridge & my wife and I are constituents in District 3 of the municipality.

I am here today to raise the concern that many of the citizens in my district, as well as those in other districts, have, regarding the fact we see council rarely engaged in dialogue with the citizens it represents, hiding from important issues and often invisible to taxpayers. Further, we feel council's voice often does not express the views of we, the constituents it serves.

As a group, we recently formed the Guysborough Communities Coalition, and are here today petitioning the council to make changes; beginning by participating in a town hall-style meeting with invited constituents, and the full council in attendance. This meeting, as already noted, would follow the format of the town hall meeting we initiated for Councillor DeCoff, and would be a catalyst to begin an honest, open dialogue with everyone.

A community is not an ideal. It is people sharing common perspectives, engaged in joint action; we the citizens, as well as the council we elected. It is all of us working together.

Years ago I worked with indigenous people in Northern Manitoba. My community efforts included building a common voice between native people and residents of Ft. Churchill. It was then a community racked by social problems- a community out of touch. However, we developed a dialogue through a series of town hall-style meetings with everyone. Shared, open dialogue. All found their voice and with it, the stability of the community.

At another point, I lived in a rural community that held annual town meetings. At first, the venue was the town hall, a small, single room converted schoolhouse; but as local issues became more complex meeting attendance grew. The town council was committed to everyone being engaged in these meetings, so for the yearly event, they erected a large tent in the town hall parking lot to accommodate everyone.

Which brings me to say I believe a council in any community has an obligation to engage openly with its citizens. Not just in a cloistered room such as this council chamber, but in larger, community venues allowing everyone the opportunity to share their thoughts, questions, and comments. Engage, discuss, and cultivate new ideas.

There is much to share and discuss in this municipality. There is the issue of fracking with many questions on both sides of the argument, but also issues such as clear-cutting, and old growth tree harvesting, and increases in property taxes. Doctor shortages, businesses closing, the economic weight of the Lifestyle Centre, which should have faced a series of countywide, public discussions before ground was even broken. The need for high-speed Internet, in-migration- attracting people here, plus reaching out to sustainable businesses such as tourism to this beautiful county. The MODG's website says, quote- "Tourism may be the District's greatest untapped resource." Maybe the council needs to focus on that eco-economy sector given the beauty here, rather than just industrial development. We are facing a growing list that warrants discussion.

You are our elected officials. You represent a municipality of approximately 4600 residents according to the 2016 census. I appreciate you have many duties as councillors, not the least of which is to listen and communicate with your constituents. Taxpayers have the right to ask questions. and for you to hear their concerns, and when appropriate, to challenge your opinions and decisions.

This municipality is made up of people across the social spectrum. Some are poor and marginalized. Some are living on fixed incomes. There are families and individuals depending on the local food bank to get by- 104 at the last count including Canso. Others work and live within moderate means, while others are fine. There are many seniors, retirees, as well as seasonal property owner's living here, too.

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But the population is shrinking at the rate of 6% annually. Young people, single, some with families, without the amenities they want or need here, are migrating out to larger urban areas. We're a population of many retirees; we need to find ways to bring a cross-section of people back to this area. Many who have moved here have brought with them, experience and knowledge which we need to take advantage of. These people moved here attracted by the area, why don't we encourage them to share their ideas and why they chose to live here?

We need this interactive dialogue to overcome the apathy many people now feel towards your council. To erase the non-transparent lines that separate you council from us, the citizens. It is incumbent on all of us- citizens and council alike, to honour our obligation to the stewardship of this municipality- to this land we all call home; good stewardship now and for generations to come. An open, town hall meeting can be a positive starting point for this community conversation.

We the taxpayers, who elected you, need access to council, not just via your municipal website, or the occasional newspaper story, but by other forms of communication. A significant part of the population is elderly and many are not computer savvy or no longer drive. This sector needs to be kept informed too. Many of these people live in the outlying areas of the county, so getting to the town of Guysborough can be difficult. They need to feel comfortable in calling their councillor, talking with them. It's your duty to reach out to all of us and give us, in return, the opportunity to hear our voice in the decision-making processes affecting our lives.

We want to be people working together, building a strong, stable community, sharing goals and common purpose. We believe we can make the impossible, possible. We need to embrace change, not fear it. We need to think differently and approach challenges in a fresh, new light. We need to work together honestly and openly. We need to listen, respect one another, and think anew. We need to act now. This is called democracy.

Our petition today is intended to give EVERYONE in this municipality, no matter the many differing points-of-view, a voice; beginning first with an open, town hall-style meeting. We will accept nothing less.

Thank you.