

## Controversial figure to speak at local freedom rally]

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Shelburne Freedom Rally will be hosting one of Ontario's most infamous anti-mask protestors and conspiracy theorists at their upcoming weekend protest.

In a Facebook post from Mar. 28, rally organizer Jeremy Glass announced that Chris Saccoccia, also known online as Chris Sky, would be guest speaking at the group's Apr. 8 protest.

‘They contacted me and asked if they could come speak in Shelburne. We've always had an open mic for anybody to speak, that wants to come,’ Glass told the Free Press. ‘I thought that was a great thing because our whole purpose is to bring numbers to the street, bring people out, and join our cause.’

Saccoccia rose to notoriety during the ‘freedom’ movement, which began as an anti-vaccine campaign and protest against COVID-19 restrictions, but it has since developed into a catch-all anti-government and pro-conspiracy group.

He is also known for a history of making antisemitic, anti-black, Islamophobic, and homophobic comments.

According to the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, an agency that monitors and researches hate groups, Saccoccia quoted Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf in a 2014 post on his Facebook page, adding, ‘Bang on, like he had a crystal ball into the future.’

He has also been documented writing, ‘6 million Jews were murdered is the biggest lie created in the history of fake Jew history.’

The Canadian Anti-Hate Network also noted Saccoccia's referencing of Black Lives Matter activists as ‘sub human.’

When asked by the Free Press whether he was concerned about Saccoccia's history of racist comments, Glass said, ‘Absolutely not, because what we have in Canada is freedom of speech and that is why it has always been an open mic in Shelburne.’

The Free Press reached out to Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills, who has expressed concerns with the ongoing ‘freedom’ demonstrations, which have occurred in the town's downtown core on a bi-weekly basis for the past year and a half.

‘There's obviously ongoing concerns about the demonstrations, but this demonstration in particular with Chris Sky, I think perhaps takes it to a different level,’ said Mills. ‘We can't restrict somebody from coming into our community, but I do think it's important to say that he doesn't represent the views and values we try to champion in our community.’

Shelburne Town Council recently held a meeting with Dufferin OPP to discuss the demonstrations and the community reaching a ‘critical boiling point’ between residents and protesters.

The local detachment told council their job is ‘to keep the peace’ and would not be taking a ‘heavy hand’ to the protests.

The Free Press reached out to the OPP for comment on plans specific to the Apr. 8 demonstration.

‘The OPP will act to preserve the peace, maintain public safety and investigate criminal wrongdoing, in accordance with legislated responsibilities and in the best interest of all involved,’ said Insp. Terry Ward, Dufferin OPP Detachment Commander, in an email to the Free Press, regarding the Apr. 8 demonstration.