This page was exported from - Shelburne Free Press
Export date: Sun Nov 1 3:05:20 2026 / +0000 GMT

Council considering changes to public question period

Written By Joshua Drakes

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Town of Shelburne considered adopting a more structured approach to its public question period during its Dec. 8 council meeting.

The town currently holds bi-weekly council meetings to discuss agenda items, hear public presentations, debate bylaws, and discuss local and regional matters. Recently, however, the format of the question period has been questioned, with a town report suggesting scrapping it entirely.

While some councillors expressed frustration with how the period currently operates, they agreed it should remain in place. Instead, they proposed tightening its structure so residents can continue to access the council regularly.

Councillor Walter Benotto said that although the question period is time-consuming, he would prefer to see it adjusted rather than removed.

?I don't like it, I'll be honest, it takes up a lot of council's time, which doesn't allow us to get to business in a timely fashion,? he said. ?But I'm not against a question period, as long as it's run in a timely manner.?

Benotto said a better-structured format would make more effective use of both the public's and council's time. He suggested a stricter, time-limited forum for residents to ask questions, citing how other municipalities manage their periods with clearer rules.

?Each questioner is allowed a period of time to do a bit of a preamble to a question, but it must be a question specific to town business in the form of the agenda, property or a question about something they had an interaction with staff about,? he said. ?One question, and one question only. If we follow that format, then I think it's fair and right that our citizens are able to ask questions. They should have the right to come in front of the council and present their case.?

Mayor Wade Mills received Benotto's comments positively. He agreed with the observations about how question period is currently handled, noting that while rules already exist in the procedural by-law, they have been applied loosely.

?If you look at our procedural by-law, if there are prescriptive limits and time limits and everything else, they're all sort of subject to the chair's discretion,? he said. ?If the person asking questions is their first time before council, and they aren't familiar with the rules, obviously I'll give them extra leeway.?

However, he added that such leeway cannot be endless. While he fully supports keeping the question period, he encouraged residents to consider the nature of the questions they bring forward and to use other mechanisms, such as presentations or delegations, for longer or more detailed matters.

?However, the point is well taken that this is designed as a question period; it's not designed as an open forum,? he said. ?There has to be some give and take. My message to the public is that I'm happy to continue with the question period going forward, but if you're looking for a longer discussion with council or to make a pitch, then make use of the mechanisms in the agenda for a presentation or delegation.?

Council remains in agreement that public question periods are an important way for residents to directly engage with their elected representatives. For now, the period isn't going anywhere, but council has recognized the need for changes to keep it aligned with its intended purpose.

Residents can expect rules to be potentially more strictly enforced going forward, while town staff have been tasked with amending the draft by-law for further review.