

BALLOT BOX BARRIERS

- a new approach to attract people to municipal government

How many of these statements are true for your municipality?

- We always have a full slate of candidates to run in every election and hold elections for every position on council.
- Our council is an accurate reflection of the people we represent.
- We have a high voter turnout at election time.
- We have a high level of citizen engagement in the decision making process.

If you are able to say all of these are true for your community pat yourself on the back, you are doing an amazing job. However if you are like most municipalities in Manitoba some of these statements are false. Yet I think we would all agree that in a healthy democracy we need citizen engagement and councils that are a reflection of the people they are mandated to represent. This is the starting point for *Ballot Box Barriers*, the recently released report from the AMM.

Ballot Box Barriers is not intended to be a critique of the last 100 years of municipal government in Manitoba, nor is it an attempt to replace any elected municipal official or disparage the amazing work municipal officials have done and continue to do every day in this province and across Canada. This report aims to do the very opposite by exploring how to get more people interested and engaged in municipal government to build better councils and better communities.

Right now in Canada, women account for only 22% of Parliament, 22% of provincial legislatures (and only 25% of provincial cabinets), and 23% of municipal councils. While in Manitoba we fare a little better at the provincial and federal levels with women accounting for 5 of the current 13 Members of Parliament (38%), and 18 of 57 Members of the Provincial Legislature (32%), we remain far lower municipally. In Manitoba only 15% of elected officials are women, and only 7% of heads of council are women.

While women are clearly not equally represented at all levels of government, the problem seems to be more profound at the municipal level. The ultimate question is what can be done about it?

Ballot Box Barriers is an attempt to lay the groundwork and offer options for councils to identify barriers and possible solutions to bring more women into municipal government. The report begins by exploring the role of women in government in Canada, both historically and today, as well as the role of women in government around the world. It then takes a cross-Canada look at what has been done in each province. The report also offers up a more in-depth review of the amazing work done by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in promoting women in municipal government across Canada.

The report then turns its attention to Manitoba with a recap of excellent past




Mayor Shirley Kalyniuk, AMM Urban Vice-President and Chair of the AMM Task Force on Women in Municipal Government, presents *Ballot Box Barriers* at the Interlake June District Meeting in Fraserwood.

initiatives done by various groups. This is followed by a review of the questionnaire completed by current elected municipal officials in Manitoba to get their firsthand thoughts and insights into this issue.

The focus of *Ballot Box Barriers* then shifts to synthesizing the research and offering solutions. Twelve major barriers are identified and outlined in detail, each based on the work highlighted in the previous section. This is followed by a presentation of possible solutions to overcome the barriers identified. These possible solutions should be viewed as just that – possible solutions. Municipal government has a long and proud history of adapting ideas to fit their unique situations and these should certainly be treated no differently.

The report concludes with a three-point action plan to ensure the barriers, solutions and great work recapped in the report is carried forward. The report recommends a four-year plan led by the AMM be implemented to raise awareness of municipal government and bring more women into the process before the 2014 municipal election. The plan also calls for the AMM to provide support for existing elected officials, women or men, interested in the issue. The plan further recommends AMM keep this issue front and centre throughout the implementation of the four-year plan.

Ballot Box Barriers is our attempt to bring positive proactive solutions to the discussion of increasing women's participation in municipal politics. Ultimately the decision to act rests with you. 



These Parkland District delegates were eager to get their copy of *Ballot Box Barriers*.

AMM Task Force

The AMM Task Force on Women in Municipal Government was established in December 2009 in response to a 2009 Convention Resolution. While the resolution's original mandate was to identify barriers, the Task Force moved a step further by exploring possible solutions and developing an action plan over the next four years in anticipation of the 2014 municipal election.

***Ballot Box Barriers* is available at www.amm.mb.ca/res_women.html or by calling the AMM office at 204-856-2366.**