

Women in MUNICIPAL POLITICS

June, 2009 marked a milestone in the AMM's history. No, it was not our 10th anniversary (that was last year). Nor was it the 100th anniversary of our predecessor, the Union of Manitoba Municipalities (that was in 2006).

Still not sure? Here is a hint: in June, AMM delegates elected Councillor Betty Nykyforak to the position of Parkland Urban Director. Why is that significant?

It is significant because the election of another woman on the AMM board means it is now comprised of 32% women.

That is right, 6 out of 19 – including the Urban Vice-President, Shirley Kalyniuk – are now female. And that IS significant. It is significant because in Canada, only 23 per cent of municipal councils are made up of women. And the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) wants that number to increase by 30% by 2026. This is important because, as the FCM's report *Getting to 30% by 2026* states, "The United Nations defines 30% as the minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women's concerns."

This is not a new trend. This report is simply the latest in a great deal of laudable work done by FCM over the past decade. The FCM Canadian Women in Municipal Government Committee was formed in 1999 to develop mentoring programs for new women municipal officials. It has also created an annual scholarship and holds a forum at FCM's Annual Conference.



During this year's forum, FCM's


Regional Champions Campaign – a grassroots initiative to build networks throughout Canada to encourage, support and mentor women who are considering running for election to municipal government – kicked off a social media strategy with the launch of its Facebook page. It is hoped that this page (located at <http://tinyurl.com/fcmwmg>) will function as "a place to meet, ask questions, get advice from peers, and share stories." Judging from the number of "fans" of this page – 745 and counting – the strategy is spot-on.

The AMM supports these initiatives at the federal level and has been pushing for more women in municipal politics for some time, too. In Manitoba, only 8% of mayors and 17% of councillors are female¹, well below the national averages of 12.9% and 22.9 – and certainly nowhere near the 30% mark that FCM is striving for.

Back in 2005 our Municipal Leader four-part series *Diversity in Municipal Politics* kicked off with – you guessed it – the topic of women in politics. That was leading up to a 2006 municipal election, and here we are again, looking forward one year from now when October 2010 rolls around. What will WE do, in our communities, to encourage more women to run for public office next year?

As AMM members, we should be proud that our provincial association represents a higher percentage of women than the national average. But we also need to strongly advocate for a much higher female representation on municipal councils. To find out more, view FCM's strategy to increase the number of Canadian women in municipal government here: <http://www.fcm.ca/english/View.asp?mp=1166&x=1168>.

And if you see Betty Nykyforak anytime soon (or any of the other women on the AMM Board of Directors) feel free to congratulate them for bucking the trend.

Endnotes ¹ FCM Municipal Statistics Male-Female Gender Statistics, January 13, 2009 

The United Nations defines 30% as the minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women's concerns.

Correction:

There was an omission in an article in the summer 2009 issue of Municipal Leader entitled "Manitoba communities take action to reduce GHG emissions and fight climate change" by Brendan Boyd. The list of participants in the box on p. 41 should also include the RM of Taché. We regret the error.