



FEDERATION
OF CANADIAN
MUNICIPALITIES

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CANADIENNE DES
MUNICIPALITÉS

WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: GETTING TO 30% BY 2026



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Table of Contents

Getting to 30% by 2026	1
Background: Where are the Women in Government?	1
Male-Female Municipal Statistics 2006	4
Advocate, Educate, Communicate.	5
Start Campaign Schools.	5
Recruit Women.	6
Make Municipal Government Accessible.	7
Ensure Equality.	7
Adjust Electoral Terms	8
Promote Respect	9
Support Professional Development.	10
Encourage Employer Support.	10
Highlight Women’s Contributions	11
Support Women’s Networks	12
Starting Young	13
Mentoring and Job Shadowing.	14
Support Work-Family Balance	14
Money Matters	15
Making Gender Mainstream.	15
Acknowledgements.	17
Appendix I	
Sample Model Resolution for Support from Council.	18

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has been the national voice of municipal government since 1901. With close to 2,000 members, FCM represents the interests of municipalities on policy and program matters that fall within federal jurisdiction. Members include Canada’s largest cities, small urban and rural communities, and 21 provincial and territorial municipal associations.

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Getting to 30% by 2026

Canada needs more women in government, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) wants their numbers increased from the current 21.4% of municipal councils to 30% by 2026.

The United Nations defines 30% as the minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women's concerns. Women represent 12.9% of mayors and 22.9% of councillors in Canada, for an average of 21.4%, and a total of 5,242 women out of a total of 24,542 mayors and councillors.

Based on current statistics, Canada would need 2,120 more women in elected office today to reach the 30% target. That means increasing the number of women in municipal government by roughly 100 every year for the next 20 years.

To support this effort, FCM has developed a set of strategies and tactics that municipal councils can use to further the involvement of women in municipal government. These are based on discussions from a series of workshops and events held across the country in 2005–2006.

Background: Where are the Women in Government?

Women make up 52% of the Canadian population, but only 21.4% of municipal councils. That puts Canada behind Sweden (45.3%), Finland (37.5%), Spain (36.0%) and New Zealand (32.2%).¹

Even at 21.4%, Canada's municipal councils have a higher percentage of women than the House of Commons (20.8%). In the 2006 federal election, 380 women ran as candidates, but only 64 were elected—two fewer than were elected in 2004.

This is the real democratic deficit. Our communities cannot afford to lose the insights and expertise of half their citizens. To address this deficit, FCM, with support from Status of Women Canada, initiated a project to increase women's participation in municipal government.

“Canada is a progressive country and a world leader in many things. Unfortunately, women's participation in political life is not one of them. Our goal is to reduce the real democratic deficit, the one that sees half of our population under-represented in our political institutions.”

**FCM Past President Ann MacLean,
Former Mayor of New Glasgow,
Nova Scotia**

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006

Cranbrook workshop participants suggested creating an educational forum through the College of the Rockies and its satellite campuses, complete with an agenda of speakers and relevant topics.

The first phase of the project took place in 2004. Participatory research was carried out in six Canadian communities, and 152 FCM member municipalities took part in a national survey on women's participation. The information collected was used to produce FCM's *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making* report and resource kit.

Women interviewed for the report identified a number of reasons why they were not involved in municipal politics, including:

- inadequate information on how to get involved
- lack of connections between municipalities and women's groups
- the perception that volunteer groups afford women better opportunities to make a difference
- family responsibilities
- a lack of inclusive policies
- discrimination

FCM's response to these findings was to initiate the second phase of the project, again with support from Status of Women Canada, to increase women's participation in municipal government.

This phase has several goals. The first involves highlighting the need for action to get more women elected to local government. The second goal is to lay the groundwork for local groups that will take up this issue, foster local understanding, and bring about change in each community. The third goal is to develop and implement a National Strategic Action Plan to increase women's participation in municipal life.

This phase also had two components: a mobilization tour and a series of workshops. The focus of the mobilization tour was to build support for increasing women's political participation, by using the national media to raise awareness, and by building local networks for change. FCM Past President, New Glasgow Mayor Ann MacLean, led the mobilization tour.

The workshops took place in rural and urban communities with the participation of women and men representing a broad range



Councillor Liz Schatschneider, City of Cranbrook. City of Cranbrook workshop

of community interest groups, including community organizations, academic institutions, municipal government and other orders of government. Information for the development of the National Strategic Action Plan was collected during nine workshops and one mobilization event. More information is available on FCM's website at www.fcm.ca.

The workshop process was essential in determining how to effect change. Participants were asked to consider the barriers to women's participation, then to brainstorm ways of overcoming existing barriers.

The *Actions for Councils* contained here are based on brainstorming strategies developed during break-out group discussions in each of the participating municipalities. The recommended tactics have been used to develop steps municipal councils can take to further the involvement of women in municipal government.

Adopting strategies to increase women's participation in municipal decision-making supports FCM's mandate to improve the quality of life in all communities by promoting strong, effective and accountable municipal government.

“Women have been informally politically active forever, hence their dominant presence in volunteerism. Women just need to be invited, sincerely, to formal politics.”

Cathy Rogers, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Atlantic Baptist University, panel presentation, City of Moncton workshop

Male–Female Municipal Statistics 2006

Province/Territory	Mayors		Councillors		CAOs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
British Columbia	150	37	822	377	143	39
Alberta	288	59	1,178	373	184	163
Saskatchewan	745	65	3,203	508	264	539
Manitoba	191	8	859	126	94	103
Ontario	380	63	2,157	656	277	163
Quebec	1,033	154	5,679	1,091	530	662
New Brunswick	90	15	403	137	49	54
Nova Scotia	52	4	293	87	45	10
Prince Edward Island	63	12	273	109	25	50
Newfoundland and Labrador	227	52	985	371	68	215
Yukon	5	3	21	9	7	1
Northwest Territories	17	6	74	51	15	6
Nunavut	20	5	92	54	21	3

Source: Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Advocate, Educate, Communicate

Promote community discussion about the role of women in municipal government. Information about running for public office can facilitate broader community involvement in upcoming elections.

Actions for Councils

- Hold an annual event dealing with the shortage of women in municipal government, until the situation is corrected.
- Implement an awareness campaign to demonstrate what potential candidates can expect, how they can make a difference, and what they can bring to their council. For example, launch a Municipal Government Day or Week in your community.
- Present information in locations frequented by community members such as supermarkets, shopping centres, theatres, sports arenas, community centres, women's centres, community organizations and clubs such as: Lions Club, Kiwanis, Rotary Club, Kinsmen Club, Junior Chamber International, Boys and Girls Club, Girl Guides, Scouts, Beavers and church groups.
- Host information sessions on running for office.



Left to right: Councillor Linda Sloan, City of Edmonton; Kelly Sloan, Executive Director YWCA Edmonton; Councillor Linda Osinchuk, County of Strathcona; Janet Buckmaster, YWCA Edmonton and One Woman One Vote; Councillor Karen Leibovici, City of Edmonton; and Tanis Houck, Project Coordinator, FCM, City of Edmonton and Strathcona County workshop

Start Campaign Schools

Campaign schools are an effective way to provide women with information on running for office.

Campaign schools have been developed to provide mentoring and training to women, and to familiarize them with the political skills, strategies and tactics necessary for running and winning a campaign. Some regions have pioneered campaign schools that are offered regularly, although this is the exception. An excellent online campaign school option is available through Equal Voice's *Getting to the Gate* program, which was launched in February 2006.



FCM Past President Ann MacLean, and Councillor Pam McConnell, City of Toronto. City of Toronto mobilization tour event

Actions for Councils

- **Support campaign schools in the community. Seek out existing models of campaign schools. Note lessons learned and best practices from organizations that have held campaign schools.**
- **Recognize the need to have city staff, such as Chief Administrative Officers, provide information about municipal management and administration for campaign schools.**
- **Promote Equal Voice’s bilingual online campaign school, *Getting to the Gate*, at www.equalvoice.ca for practical advice on how to run a campaign.**

Best Practices

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and Mount Saint Vincent University, have been innovative in their approach to campaign schools in Nova Scotia by working to simulate a campaign environment. For one segment of the campaign school, professional actors are located behind doors to provide candidates with the realistic door-to-door campaigning experience of not knowing who they will be talking to next. The curriculum also includes mock speeches, television interviews and media scrums to replicate the experiences that candidates incur during election mode.

Recruit Women

It is important to develop a strategy to recruit women to stand for election and to hold public office.

The goal is to recruit women of diverse backgrounds who possess an interest in, and a future vision for the community. Recruiting women to run as candidates may be as easy as saying to someone, “You would be a good councillor; why don’t you run for council?”

Actions for Councils

- **Challenge local community organizations and municipal leaders to encourage female candidates to run for election.**
- **Recommend women to sit on municipal commissions, boards and committees as a preliminary step towards increasing the number of women in office.**

Make Municipal Government Accessible

Community members require information on how to access municipal government, and how more women can become involved in municipal government.

The role of municipal government is unclear to many Canadians, and workshop participants frequently said there was even less clarity on how to become involved in municipal government. Participants agreed that there is a need to demystify municipal politics and the process of running in local elections. In fact, the word “demystify” was used in this context at each workshop.

Actions for Councils

- Provide information to the public on how municipal government is organized and how it works.
- Develop council outreach activities, such as speaking to women’s groups.
- Cultivate the expectation that women will participate in municipal decision-making, and facilitate their involvement.

Ensure Equality

Workshop participants found systemic barriers to women participating on advisory committees, boards and commissions, and these barriers must be addressed to enable women to participate in municipal government.

One way to lower these barriers is to implement a gender-balance policy that requires equal representation of women and men on municipally appointed committees, boards and commissions. The underlying premise is that women’s involvement in these advisory capacities will lead to more women being elected to municipal office.

“Many elected positions do not pay full-time salaries, yet a full-time commitment is often required.”

City of Edmonton and Strathcona County workshop participant

“I think I will be more active in encouraging more women to run.”

City of Charlottetown workshop participant

Actions for Councils

- **Move a council resolution to mandate gender balance (50-50 women and men) on committees, boards and commissions, to involve more women in municipal decision-making.**
- **Actively recruit more women than men to sit on committees, boards and commissions, in order to correct the imbalance.**

“The problem of low incomes in small municipalities is an obstacle to the involvement of women in politics.”

City of Lévis workshop participant

Adjust Electoral Terms

The length of some municipal government terms may discourage potential candidates from running.

Suggested solutions include:

- The Town of Virден workshop participants suggested decreasing the length of council terms to create more vacancies and promote diversity on councils.
- Impose term limits.
- Stagger terms to ensure a complementary blend of experienced and new councillors. Staggered terms could also create mentorship opportunities for new councillors to work with experienced councillors.

Municipalities need to be flexible to encourage people to run for office. This could mean shortening or staggering terms to better suit the needs of local citizens, their schedules and the need for work-life balance.

“This is not a women’s issue, it is a societal issue.”

Councillor Jacques Legendre,
City of Ottawa

Job-sharing has proven successful in other sectors, and should be fully explored in the municipal sector, especially in terms of women’s extensive paid and unpaid work schedules. If municipalities want to help facilitate women’s involvement in municipal life, they must be prepared to be creative and flexible in their approaches.

Actions for Councils

- **Develop a job-sharing program for municipal staff and council members, to encourage local public engagement and diversity on councils.**

Promote Respect

Workshop participants cited the adversarial nature of council deliberations as a deterrent to their participation.

It is essential for councils to lead by example and create an atmosphere of respect in the council chambers and in the community. Promoting an environment of mutual respect on council would help to encourage women's participation in municipal government.

The relationships of women on a council are often scrutinized in a way that male relationships are not. Workshop participants said that male councillors who disagree on an issue are less likely to get the same attention as women. There are prevailing attitudes that it is "unladylike" to engage in a debate or to disagree. Furthermore, pejorative terms are sometimes used to describe women who are seen as aggressive. Men who demonstrate the same behaviour are often rewarded and thought to be leaders.

In some municipalities, people who wish to speak during council meetings are required to state their name and address. This creates a potential risk factor for women. Having to reveal this information may preclude some women from participating in dialogue at council meetings. For safety reasons, measures should be taken to keep this information confidential.

Actions for Councils

- **Develop and enforce a code of ethics to prohibit demeaning conduct towards fellow councillors.**
- **Demonstrate that council is serious about consensus-building and consider establishing a "Mediation Committee" with trained staff to deal with conflict issues.**

"Place limits on the number of terms an individual can run, and stagger terms to ensure that there is a mix of experiences and new councillors whenever possible."

City of Charlottetown
workshop participant

“There needs to be a collective invitation for women to enter politics without the expectation that women conform to the stereotypes. Men sometimes act condescending towards women; they need to confront the uncivil behaviour of other men towards women. The issue is not that women’s presence is being disagreed with, but men deal with each other in aggressive ways.”

Summary of table discussion,
Toronto event

Support Professional Development

Workshop attendees identified the need for councillors to have an initial orientation session and ongoing professional development opportunities.

Some municipalities provide orientation sessions and an information manual, although this is not consistent in municipalities throughout the country. In general, professional development opportunities are reportedly limited.

Actions for Councils

- **Provide professional development opportunities for council members, so that elected officials can enhance or develop leadership skills. Include skill development in the areas of time management (running meetings efficiently and on schedule; balancing work-life issues); listening skills (inclusive of diverse voices); conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation; team-building; and public-speaking skills.**

Encourage Employer Support

Workshop participants suggested working with employers to encourage people to run for municipal office, and to ensure a diverse representation of people on council.

In Charlottetown, workshop participants discussed the potential for an employer “buy-in” strategy, in which employers would offer compensation to allow employees who are in elected office to participate in municipal meetings.

Some workplaces have implemented a paid volunteer day for employees, where the employee chooses the date, and a local organization at which to volunteer for a day. This type of program could be extended to include “municipal days” to encourage employee participation on municipally appointed committees, boards and commissions.

Actions for Councils

- Approach the Chamber of Commerce and local employers to discuss opportunities to develop workplace support programs for women interested in running for office.
- Encourage employers to offer “political leave” similar to the concept of maternity or paternity leave.
- Promote the development of volunteer days or municipal days in all sectors, to encourage people to participate in community life, including municipal meetings.

Best Practices

Former New Brunswick Energy Minister Bruce Fitch credited Scotiabank’s support for his decision to become involved in municipal government as a councillor and then as Mayor of Riverview, which led to his role as Minister of Energy and Minister of Justice & Consumer Affairs for the Province of New Brunswick.

“Mayors can take up the challenge and appoint more women than men to commissions, in an attempt to even the playing field, after years of imbalance.”

City of Moncton
workshop participant

Highlight Women’s Contributions

Young women in particular need role models, in order to better understand how they can contribute to municipal life.

It is important to celebrate the accomplishments of local women who have been important figures in Canadian history.

Actions for Councils

- Recognize the contributions of local women who are, or have been, leaders in the community.
- Create and dedicate public art and public spaces to women who are, or have been, community leaders. For example, name a public park, sports facility or cultural centre after a woman in the community.
- Support and enhance existing women’s leadership awards.



Mayor Clifford Lee, City of Charlottetown. City of Charlottetown workshop

Best Practices

Start a networking group for women in business or government; like Action Southwest in Saskatchewan.

Each year, the Moncton Business and Professional Women's Club offers the H. Dell McAuley Memorial Bursary to a young woman entering university. McAuley was a former councillor for the City of Moncton.



Steering Committee of the City for All Women Initiative. Community women wear peach scarves to be visible when they take their concerns to Ottawa City Council.

Support Women's Networks

Effective networks are invaluable to women as they launch campaigns and pursue elected office.

Municipalities and community organizations can play an active role in facilitating networking opportunities for women. For example, four women in the Moncton area campaigned together and were elected. They helped each other to campaign and win in the true sense of collaboration.

Actions for Councils

- **Determine the kinds of support and action that women need in order to enter the political arena.**
- **Offer education, discussion and support across party lines.**
- **Develop a central information point at town or city council, such as an interactive website for women to access.**
- **Create links on municipal websites to the websites of national organizations that are working to increase women's participation in municipal government. Highlight regional and national seminars and conferences.**

Best Practices

There are currently nine Commissions Consultatives Femmes et Ville functioning as part of municipal councils in Quebec. These committees function somewhat differently in each of their respective communities, with an overarching principle to increase women's participation on municipal committees.

“Recognize and celebrate women and their accomplishments.”

City of Regina and SUMA
workshop participant

Starting Young

Both girls and boys need to see women on council. It is particularly important to interest girls and young women in politics, if municipal councils are to have more women in the future.

Actions for Councils

- **Promote “boy mayor/councillor for a day” and “girl mayor/councillor for a day” contests in local schools.**
- **Designate times for young people to meet council members and attend council meetings.**
- **Add a youth member to council in a non-voting position. Another option would be to implement a youth council in association with municipal council, allowing several youth at a time to participate in council discussions. Provide ample opportunities for youth to comment on issues prior to a council vote.**

Best Practices

Mayor Mitton of Moncton, New Brunswick, created a Mayor’s Youth Advisory Committee to look at ways to improve the quality of life for young people in the community.

Students in Strasbourg, Saskatchewan, voted to have Mayor Schultz as the guest speaker for graduation, because they admire her as a leader and because she is approachable to all age groups, said Linda Lanigan, Councillor and Deputy Mayor, Town of Strasbourg.

Mayor Fiacco of the City of Regina implemented an initiative called Mayor for a Day. His program is open to children in Grades six, seven and eight from the public and Catholic school systems. Children are asked to submit a 500-word essay on why they love Regina, and what they would do to improve the city if they were Mayor.

Hazel McCallion, Mayor of Mississauga, Ontario since 1978, was first runner-up in the 2005 World Mayor contest. She was described on the World Mayor website as “Canada’s best-known and arguably most successful mayor. Her administration has become a byword for businesslike and prudent city management. Mississauga, with its population of more than 700,000, is the safest of the country’s big cities, and has been kept debt-free throughout Mayor McCallion’s tenure.”

World Mayor Award 2006

“When a little boy thinks of his mayor or city councillor, he still more often conjures up a male image, because that’s whom he has most frequently, or perhaps only, seen. Even when he thinks of his provincial MLA or federal MP, he naturally thinks more frequently of a male—that’s whom he sees most often. This becomes an option for him as he anticipates his adult life. When a little girl thinks of her mayor or city councillor, she also thinks male first, unless she’s been proactively told to picture herself there, because that’s what she too is used to seeing.”

Cathy Rogers, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Atlantic Baptist University, panel presentation, City of Moncton workshop

Mentoring and Job Shadowing

One-to-one mentoring is the best way to provide information to women considering entering politics.

Developing mentorship opportunities can provide women with the support they need to run in municipal elections. Moreover, job-shadowing opportunities can offer students and women a realistic taste of the workings of municipal council.

Actions for Councils

- **Facilitate internship and job-shadowing opportunities with council, so that students can better understand the role of municipal leaders.**
- **Work with Equal Voice and other organizations seeking to develop an online mentorship program.**

Support Work-Family Balance

Women continue to be responsible for a disproportionate share of childcare and other domestic work, which makes it difficult for them to participate in municipal government.

Women’s involvement in government will continue to lag until improvements are made to childcare and eldercare programs, and until women are financially recognized for their contributions at home.

Actions for Councils

- **Review council operations to accommodate women’s family responsibilities; for example, adapt meeting times and provide childcare.**
- **Consider providing subsidies to municipal councillors for the costs of childcare and eldercare.**

Schedules for elected officials should respect the needs of women and families: improvements that will also benefit male councillors. For example, childcare provided on site may allow women and men on council to achieve a better work-life balance, and work-life balance is necessary in order to recruit and retain qualified candidates.

Money Matters

Women continue to earn less than men, and their work at home is not valued in economic terms.

This, combined with the lack of adequate financial compensation for elected officials in some municipalities, and the financial support required to run an election campaign, deters women from participating in municipal government.

In addition, skills used in business tend to be more highly valued than those used in the volunteer or not-for-profit sector. Workshop participants observed that private-business owners, lawyers and other professionals who have flexible hours are often the people who can take on local council responsibilities. Because women candidates tend to have fewer financial resources than men, placing a cap on election spending could help to level the playing field for women.

Actions for Councils

- **Cap municipal election spending.**
- **Consider providing financial support to candidates, based on need.**

Making Gender Mainstream

Gender mainstreaming is defined as “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, and programmes, in any area and at all levels.” (UNESCO, 2000)

Councils require information about gender mainstreaming to inform their decision-making, and local planning authorities need the tools to incorporate gender considerations into their planning.

Actions for Councils

- **Encourage council to take the “How Women-Friendly Is Your City?” evaluation in *A City Tailored to Women—The Role of Municipal Governments in Achieving Gender Equality*.**

“Creating awareness of both genders is the key!”

City of Hamilton
workshop participant

“There are barriers that people have to overcome to make accommodations for both family and political life. It is very hard for a single parent, either the mother or the father, to make a difference without it affecting their work-life balance.”

Councillor Bill Gray, City of Regina

“Planning policies influence the lives of women and men in different ways, and both perspectives are needed in the planning process. Gender is the most fundamental organizing feature of society, affecting our lives from the moment we are born. Gender mainstreaming recognizes diversity between genders, as well as remembering that gender cuts across other kinds of differences, ethnicity, class, disability and age.”

Royal Town Planning
Institute, 2003

- **Educate councillors and planners about gender mainstreaming. Seek out the advice of women’s groups and organizations such as Women in Cities Montreal, Status of Women Canada and the Canadian International Development Agency, for more information about gender analysis and gender mainstreaming.**
- **Provide FCM with updated information after each municipal election, and when other changes in your local government occur (contact: membership@fcm.ca). It is vital to inform FCM about the gender ratio of municipal staff, councillors and mayors, so that national statistics can continue to be gathered.**
- **Set concrete measurable goals that hold both community members and elected officials accountable for the needs of both women and men.**

Best Practices

A few years ago, Vancouver City Council adopted a gender-equality strategy for the city. Similarly, Ottawa’s City for All Women Initiative published a gender-equality guide.

In the City of Charlottetown, educational and training modules were developed and presented to help managers, supervisors and other employees better understand their role and responsibilities in preventing family violence. These modules helped raise awareness and address the specific needs of front-line service providers, such as police, fire, recreational services, and school-crossing guards. This training is ongoing and provided to all new employees and elected officials. The City is incorporating this training into management policies and practices with the Human Resource department to ensure sustainability over time.

Acknowledgements

The FCM Standing Committee for Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of:

- The more than 400 women and men who participated in workshops and other events for this project. The information contained here is based on their feedback.
- Ann MacLean, FCM Past President and Former Mayor of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia: spokesperson for the Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government mobilization tour
- Councillor Louise Poirier of the City of Gatineau: Chair of FCM's Standing Committee for Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government

FCM acknowledges the following municipalities and organizations that offered tremendous support for the project workshops and the mobilization tour event:

- Cape Breton Regional Municipality
- City of Charlottetown
- City of Cranbrook
- City of Edmonton
- City of Hamilton Status of Women Committee
- City of Hamilton
- City of Lévis
- City of Moncton
- City of Regina
- City of Toronto
- College of the Rockies
- County of Strathcona
- Moncton Business and Professional Women's Club
- PEI Coalition for Women in Government
- Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA)
- Town of Virden
- YWCA Edmonton

FCM appreciates the financial assistance provided by Status of Women Canada for this project.

Of special note

The Standing Committee gratefully acknowledges the many contributions of the late Regina Councillor Michael Badham to this project. Councillor Badham forwarded a resolution to City of Regina Council to co-host a workshop with the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association. A passionate advocate of equal rights, Mike was also a mentor to many who aspired to play a role in municipal government. He was a remarkable man and he will be greatly missed.

For more information, please contact: info@fcm.ca

Appendix I

Sample Model Resolution for Support from Council

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the following wording be adopted:

WHEREAS in Canada, women’s representation in municipal government is 21.4%, and women make up just 20.8% of Members of Parliament, placing Canada 44th out of 188 countries in terms of the number of women in national politics;

WHEREAS there is a democratic deficit—one that sees half of our population underrepresented in our political institutions;

WHEREAS we want to close that gender gap, because Canada and our communities cannot afford to lose the insights and expertise of half their citizens; and

WHEREAS we need women in municipal government to reflect the life experiences of women;

BE IT RESOLVED that Council will strive to address the barriers that impede women’s participation in our community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Council support the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ national campaign to increase the number of women on Council to 30% of the total by 2026.