



## Municipal Government: More Than Rules, Rates & Recreation

Prince Edward Island Advisory Council on the Status of Women  
Guide to the Issues — Province-Wide Municipal Elections  
November 6, 2006

Municipal (local) governments are often seen as just responsible for "rules, rates and recreation." But municipalities on PEI touch many aspects of the lives of women and their families. With municipal elections coming up on Monday, November 6, 2006, the two cities, seven towns and two of the communities will hold day-long election polls like those in a provincial election to choose their councils. Another 64 communities will hold special election meetings to choose community councils.



With these important local elections coming up, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women asks PEI women to consider: As a woman on PEI, what should I expect from my local government?



### Services

Municipal governments on PEI have the obligation to provide services to citizens in their communities and the power to enact local by-laws. They are able to create these services and by-laws based on local input, local authority, and local control. This is important for projects of local interest that can't reasonably be managed by centralized provincial and federal governments that deal with larger territories and larger populations.

### Taxes

The Province of PEI assesses the value of all properties on the Island. The Province collects taxes on behalf of municipalities, retains a portion of the tax, and distributes the remaining amount to municipalities through grants and contracts for services such as police, highways, and recreation. In general, the more services a municipality provides to citizens, the larger its grant. Municipal governments can't change the value of properties, but they can set the rate at which properties are taxed within their municipality. On PEI they also collect revenues by selling permits and licenses and from charging user fees.

### Incorporation

Much of Prince Edward Island's landmass is not incorporated into any municipality. Some non-incorporated regions on PEI have been unwilling to incorporate as municipalities because they do not wish to pay more taxes. Given Islanders' hard work and low wages, PEI municipal governments do, indeed, have a special responsibility to ensure that the services they provide through local government are worth the cost to citizens in taxes. However, with a proper balance between taxation and services, incorporation can provide advantages. Citizens in incorporated areas have access to services that are locally implemented. They also gain opportunities for projects and funds — whether for rinks or for buses — that are only available for incorporated regions. In 2004, citizens in one non-incorporated area of PEI were shocked to learn that a developer planned to open a strip club in their community. Without a municipal government to regulate development in their local area, women in the community found themselves unsure what processes existed to let them have their say to block a development they did not want.

## Women in Local Government



**KIRSTIN LUND**  
Council Chairperson from Keppoch

I think that one of the ways that municipal governments could attract more women is to really focus on improving problem solving and decision making. Research done by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government indicates that women are turned off by what they perceive to be competitive and aggressive methods of decision-making in government and are less likely to run as a result.

Municipal governments could encourage more women to run by investing in learning how to be more collaborative and respectful in their decision-making processes and by expecting elected members to commit to working together instead of against one another. Collaboration doesn't mean that an individual councillor can't stand up for the best interests of his or her ward — it means that they can do so without being attacked by other elected members. Collaboration means being committed to getting the needs of your constituents met in a way that doesn't leave other community members without. In other words, councillors would be committed to working towards a win-win solution instead of "fighting for rights." Municipalities moving towards that goal will see a difference in the number of women running in the future.

As more power and responsibility fall to municipalities in Canada, PEI women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to:

- work cooperatively with other levels of government to ensure that citizens' needs are met and that policies and practices work together to support equity and diversity.
- incorporate social values, including equity and diversity, in all of their policies, practices, and plans.
- actively create a sense of community that is inclusive, equitable, and diverse.

## Safety

*Women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to pay special attention to women and children's safety – in their homes and in public areas.*

Local governments have a special role in protecting your safety and that of your family. In most communities, basic protection starts by ensuring you are protected by adequate fire and police services. By-laws often support safety goals. An example would be a by-law requiring cyclists to wear helmets. Other safety initiatives might include ensuring that roadways, sidewalks, and pathways are well-lit at night; providing supervision in public spaces such as parks; and requiring sufficient security at public events. ➤

Recognizing the importance of safety from violence, the City of Charlottetown has included a "safety audit" of the city among its initiatives to prevent violence against women and children.



Local governments play a longstanding and highly visible role in creating and supporting recreation events in communities. On PEI, local governments often take an especially keen interest in sponsoring sports events (such as tournaments), facilities (such as rinks and soccer fields), and programs (such as minor sports). Though the sports world is changing, sports activities have long been focused on boys and men. Local governments have a role to play in ensuring women's and girls' sports are supported equally with men's and boys'. ➤

They can support equitable access to recreation for all ages, incomes, and ranges of intellectual and physical ability in the community. They can promote fair play, cooperation, and non-violence in recreation.

## Recreation

*Women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to actively promote equitable access to and non-violence in community-supported recreation facilities and programs.*

*The Famous Five, Ottawa*



## Promoting Safety, Preventing Family Violence



**LISA MURPHY**  
Director from  
West Royalty

More and more of us live in cities, and this affects the dynamics and interactions of individuals and families. Somebody has to make sure there are enough lights on a street or in a stairwell, or that children's playground equipment is far enough away from shrubs that could hide a predator. Municipalities don't automatically see a role for themselves in preventing family violence, but I've been really pleased to see the initiative that Charlottetown has taken for a low-cost, wide-reaching anti-violence campaign. The Mayor also took a personal initiative to reach out to people in the community who know about the situation of violence and its impact and what sort of visible initiatives would make a difference. City Hall also has a real, natural partnership with the businesses of the city and can help influence public opinion.

## Celebrating Women through Public Art



**SANDY KOWALIK**  
Part-time Project  
Coordinator from  
Charlottetown

I live in Charlottetown in Ward 4. It's a wonderfully diverse neighbourhood made up of young and old, working class and professionals, families and singles. I love this city and congratulate city council for all the work that has gone into making this a more beautiful place to live. What I would like to see from our civic leaders is a more comprehensive vision and plan for public art in this city. We have a number of well-educated and accomplished artists and cultural workers in our midst that could provide direction. We have a scattering of sculptures here — most honouring our veterans and men's contribution to our society. I'd like the work and achievements of women recognized and celebrated in a public way. Around the world, public art helps define the unique nature of individual cities. A public art plan, with a proper budget, would enhance the beauty of our city and reflect the contributions of all our citizens.

## Sticking to a Positive Agenda



**SISTER NORMA GALLANT**  
Council member  
from Wellington

Belief in team work and the best quality of life for everyone led me to accept election to a budding rural municipal council for the past five years, a very positive experience. However, it has been a challenge for me to match full-time employment with evening or early morning meetings for council. I can understand why women shy away from municipal governance due to their family and household responsibilities. It could make election difficult especially for women who are in one-parent family situations. Being the only woman on the executive council has made me aware of the importance of women's involvement in municipal councils. If rural communities are to grow stronger, women need to be there at the decision table to bring their specific sense of community and well being for everyone. We need to take active roles to build stronger and safer communities in true partnership and collaboration with one another rather than in competition with men or any other women. We can all be winners: young and older, women and men!

## Culture

Women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to support and encourage full and active participation of women and girls in the cultural activities of the community, including non-traditional roles.



Local governments also have opportunities and responsibilities to promote arts, crafts, and culture for citizens. This might include support for individual artists and artisans, cultural facilities (such as community centres, galleries, or theatres), programs (such as art classes for youth), or events (such as ceilidhs, concerts, or plays). As in the case of sports and recreation, local governments have a role in ensuring that both women and men have equitable access to support in the arts. They can also promote women's participation in non-traditional roles in cultural activities — for instance emceeing a concert rather than just providing fudge for the intermission! They can support access to cultural programming and events for all ages. ➤

incomes, and levels of ability. Community heritage activities and programs can tell the histories of women and the diversity of citizens who shaped the community in visible and less visible ways. Local governments can also encourage diversity in their communities by creating welcoming environments for newcomers to the community and newcomers to Canada. This may involve creating opportunities for cultural exchange, holding public meetings in more than one language, ensuring culturally sensitive supports in health and other public services, or helping make connections between newcomer families and long-standing families in the community.

Local governments make many decisions that affect the local environment. By-laws, zoning, and regulations all affect the way land can be used — whether for housing, business development, waste disposal, farming, parkland, or other uses. Decisions about land use have a major and lasting effect on the environment we share. As our Island environment faces the challenges that come with climate change and development pressures, protecting the environment will become a more and more important job of local, and all, governments. There will be large-scale decisions for local governments to make. ➤

But seemingly small-scale decisions also affect the life and health of human and other species in our communities. On the more positive side, local governments might have programs for enhancing the community with trees and diverse plant species. They might actively support work to rehabilitate watersheds or on the more negative side, they might identify "pest" species of animals and plants and try to eradicate them. Given health risks for women and children, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women supports banning the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes in our communities

## Environment

Women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to regulate land use and environmental practices in ways that enhance the long-term health of the Island environment and all its interdependent species.



## Welcoming Newcomers



**ELAINE RABINOWITZ**  
Council  
Vice-Chairperson  
from Breadalbane

I am interested in local governments that recognize and support diversity in the community and that think about how to make small places in rural PEI welcoming to immigrants. This may take some creativity, as some communities are less likely to have services that immigrants need — language training, settlement support, or transportation. But I do believe that small places can take big steps to include newcomers, whether that's by acknowledging the many cultures of Canada in community events or by helping newcomers make supportive connections with long-time families in the community.

## Healthy Environments for Women and Children



**DARCIE PIKE-WILKIE**  
Council member  
from Alberton

I would like to challenge municipalities to strive to improve the conditions that affect the health of women and children in our communities. In light of recently released reports on the contributors linked to increased health problems for Islanders, I think local governments should continually look at issues such as safe drinking water and air quality and take the initiative to research safe alternatives to cosmetic pesticides. Don't the women and children of PEI deserve such consideration?

## Cosmetic Pesticides



**BECKY TRAMLEY**  
Part-time Office  
Administrator from  
Charlottetown

It would be nice if the City of Charlottetown and other communities would listen to studies that show that cosmetic pesticides are a health issue and they would follow in the footsteps of other cities, like Halifax, that have banned cosmetic pesticides. I have always found it strange that they say that cosmetic pesticides are "safe," yet the people applying them have to take safety precautions, and they put up signs telling people not to come near lawns that are sprayed. I don't think it's necessary to use pesticides for the sake of a beautiful lawn if there's a chance of people or pets getting sick.

Local governments are involved in housing issues in several important ways. They may grant building permits and set the rates of taxes that owners pay on their homes and property. In many Prince Edward Island communities, municipal and community councils are working hard to engage other levels of government to increase access to affordable housing for seniors and low-income families. This is important work. Without affordable housing in our communities, women who are living in situations of abuse have one more financial constraint on their ability to leave. ➤

Seniors with inadequate housing options may be constrained to stay in homes they cannot afford to maintain, or they may give up their independent living and their hopes of "aging in place"—growing old in the communities they have been part of for much of their lives.



## Housing

*Women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to work independently and in collaboration with other levels of government to create adequate and appropriate affordable housing for citizens.*

## Transportation

*Women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to support public transit initiatives that are sustainable, affordable, and accessible.*



As global climate change threatens our environment, as rising fuel prices threaten our households' abilities to be self-sufficient, as our Island population ages, and as our rural communities continue to lose young people and families to Island cities or cities elsewhere, we cannot afford to have individuals and communities cut off from jobs and services by lack of affordable and accessible public transportation. Local governments have an important role in accessing funding for transit and in cooperating with other governments and other communities to set up transit systems that work well together. ➤

Women — especially young women, senior women, and women with disabilities — face particular risks when they cannot access public transit services. These risks include social isolation, limited (sometimes dangerous) housing choices, lack of access to employment and child care, and food insecurity and other health dangers. In Charlottetown, the new public transit system merits continued support. Across PEI, the Public Transit Coalition is calling for a feasibility study to determine what province-wide public transit might look like. This would be an important first step.

## Making Public Transit Province-wide



**JANE LEDWELL**  
Policy Analyst from  
Charlottetown

I grew up in rural PEI. For a long time, we had one car for a big, busy family. This meant my mother, who worked full-time as our caregiver, had little access to transportation. Public transit is one of the most important services a local government can provide for citizens. It reduces social exclusion and isolation. It contributes to people's independence, to community-building, and to the health of the environment. Since the City of Charlottetown started its public transit service, I've been excited to see many women and families using the buses. Within city limits, they can get where they need to go for groceries, for recreation, for appointments, or for adventures. I would like to see public transit available province-wide, not just in the capital city. Then rural women, especially women caregivers, would have more options and supports.

## Collaborating for First Nations Health



**ROSEANNE SARK**  
Council member  
from Summerside

One of the main things I would like to see happen with all governments is for them to get more involved with First Nations health, for both on and off reserve First Nations. This means looking more closely at daily challenges that both health-care providers and Aboriginal people are faced with, such as cultural interpretation, transportation challenges to attend specialists, and maternity care at hospitals where cultural understanding is needed. The Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI is now working to initiate an integration project with the hopes of building a better relationship with the provincial Department of Health and First Nations of PEI, and local governments can play a part in supporting this work. Understanding the ways the different levels of government can work together — band councils, municipalities, the province, and the federal government — is very important for supporting First Nations health and access to services.

## Community Hospitals and Caregivers' Health



**ALEAH MACLELLAN**  
Council member  
from Tynes Valley

I work in a community hospital. Every day, I see why having accessible health care near the home is essential, as the family unit can stay together in times of crisis. For a family to drive to or stay in Charlottetown every day to help care for a loved one puts stress on the family emotionally, physically, and financially. If a woman is not healthy, a whole house is not healthy, because it's the woman who looks after anyone who is sick, and if she gets sick there's often no one to care for her. With young people and men going out West for work, this often leaves women at home with families to continue to carry on. The women are left as heads of the households and need health care accessible and nearby. I also see a lot of women caught in caring for elderly parents. Seniors in our community are fortunate in a way as their friends whom they have known all their lives look out for them. But local governments could do more by making sure seniors have affordable places to live and caregivers have help for transportation.

Women and diverse minority communities are under-represented in all levels of government on Prince Edward Island, and that includes local governments. According to research by the PEI Coalition for Women in Government, women made up fewer than 25% of elected municipal councillors in 2003. In municipalities which hold election polls (mostly larger municipalities), women make up just 18% of councillors. Where councillors are elected in special election meetings (mostly smaller municipalities), women do better, making up 34% of councillors. ➤

Across Canada, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has identified barriers to women's participation in their municipal governments. These included a need for more established relationships between councils and women's networks; more councils reaching out to involve women in consultations; more practical support for women candidates (including childcare, transportation, and better timing of council meetings); more support from municipalities for inclusive policies and practices; and more recognition of women's lack of time due to family responsibilities and women's paid and unpaid work.

## Women in Government

*Women in communities of all sizes should expect their local governments to take measures to eliminate barriers to women's participation in elected office at the local level, and to increase numbers of women and members of diverse groups elected in local governments.*



### Encouraging Women-Friendly Industry



**ISABELLE CHRISTIAN**  
Council member  
from Stratford

I consider work and family balance (work/life balance) a huge issue for women's well-being. When governments are working to attract industry, it is important to examine the terms and conditions of the employment that will be created there. The evidence is in: women work a shorter paid work week and a longer unpaid work week than their male counterparts. These phenomena are plainly connected. If there is to be time for nurturing family members, there is less time to devote to positions of leadership, less time to pursue growth in her small business, less flexibility about types of employment, less security as an elder. Women have been vocal, for a long time, about the disadvantages of a traditional corporate model. Recently, we see younger men who also want greater flexibility in their work routines. It is encouraging for women to have allies in changing how we all think about work.

### Educating to Encourage Political Engagement



**SADIE MACKENZIE**  
Council member  
from Montague

When I was on Montague Council, I found that I was not respected in a lot of cases — I'd go and do my work, but a couple of members would tear it apart, even if they didn't have their work done. But I enjoyed it. There were two or three people that said I'd never get there, I'd never achieve things. The thing is, you can't achieve it alone. You really have to work with your other Council members and get them to see your point of view. Otherwise whatever you're working for can get thrown out at a meeting pretty fast. One thing young people say to me that keeps them from being involved in politics is turning on the TV and seeing politicians name-calling and insulting each other. It doesn't give kids too much incentive to get involved. I think they have to start early in the schools in educating young people about politics. Even a lot of older people haven't been educated in it, and a lot don't understand the difference between federal, provincial and municipal politics.

### Women and Volunteerism



**CATHERINE MCALEER**  
Council member  
from Morell

One of the biggest issues I see facing women today is the need for both parents to go out to work. This is having a big impact on volunteerism in the community. Programs need coaches or leaders — soccer, baseball, Brownies, programs in the schools. Some programs have had to be cancelled because of lack of volunteers. Women have to work to make ends meet. It's not just for "extras." Women work to put food on the table, to have electricity and not be cut off during the winter, and so they don't have to go on social assistance. Then, when women get home, they carry the bigger burden for housework and childrearing, in addition to more responsibilities volunteering in the community. I still don't see men picking up the slack. Local government could help community programs survive by encouraging men and women to share work in the home and work in the community more fairly, since both men and women's work in the economy is needed to keep families going.

Which communities hold election polls and which have special election meetings?

### Election Polls

Charlottetown  
Summerside  
Town of Cornwall  
Town of Stratford  
Alberton  
Borden-Carleton  
Georgetown  
Kensington  
Montague  
Souris  
Tignish

### Special Election Meetings

Abrams Village  
Afton  
Alexandra  
Annandale: Little Pond-Howe Bay  
Bedeque  
Belfast  
Bonshaw  
Brackley  
Breadalbane  
Brudenell  
Cardigan  
Central Bedeque  
Central Kings  
Clyde River  
Crapaud  
Darlington  
Eastern Kings  
Ellerslie-Bideford  
Grand Tracadie  
Greenmount-Montrose  
Hampshire  
Hazelbrook  
Hunter River  
Kingston  
Kinkora  
Lady Slipper  
Linkletter  
Lorne Valley  
Lot 11 and Area  
Lower Montague  
Malpeque Bay  
Meadowbank  
Miltonvale Park  
Miminegash  
Miscouche  
Morell  
Mount Stewart  
Murray Harbour  
Murray River  
New Haven-Riverdale  
North Rustico  
North Shore  
North Wiltshire  
Northport  
O'Leary  
Pleasant Grove  
Resort Municipality  
Richmond  
Sherbrooke  
Souris West  
St. Felix  
St. Louis  
St. Nicholas  
St. Peter's Bay  
Tignish Shore  
Tyne Valley  
Union Road (Queens County)  
Valleyfield  
Victoria  
Warren Grove  
Wellington  
West River  
Winsloe South  
York



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