

**Women urged to get political: Attitudes need to change, mayor says**  
**By GREG MACVICAR**

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SYDNEY — New Glasgow Mayor Ann MacLean says many women choose not to enter municipal politics because they don't connect being a politician with bringing about positive change in their communities.

"Generally, women do not see becoming elected as a way to meet their goals," said Ms. MacLean, who is also past president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Ms. MacLean recently gave the keynote address at a Canada-wide federation workshop held in Sydney aimed at increasing the number of women in municipal government.

"We're bringing men and women together to discuss barriers to women in municipal politics and to identify strategies that will work to break them down," Ms. MacLean said. The federation plans to develop a national action plan when it holds its annual meeting in June.

Ms. MacLean said women need support to make the leap from volunteering to running for elected office.

"Our daughters need to be encouraged, our sisters need to be encouraged, our mothers need to be encouraged," she said. "They need to be told that public life is an honour."

Coun. Shirley McNamara, a member of Richmond County council for 15 years, said practical projects have to be supported, such as the campaign school for women hosted in 2004 by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women and Mount Saint Vincent University.

Ms. McNamara also said she might encourage the development of a system in which each political riding has both a male and female representative.

"Females making up 52 per cent of the population should have very close to 52 per cent of the representation in our assemblies," she said. "The gender balance is significant and important."

Ms. McNamara said her situation was somewhat unique in that her children were grown and her family supportive when she announced her decision to run municipally.

"Not every family is so supportive," she said. "But go ahead and do what your heart tells you to do anyway, and your family will be convinced."

She said families have to take the time to discuss politics.

"When I grew up, politics was a daily conversation at our dinner table," said Ms. McNamara. "Today I don't think families have that kind of conversation."

Ms. MacLean said that discussion should include letting girls know that politics is an eventual career option for them.

"They still say, 'Girls don't do that,' " she said. "It's not seeing women in these roles."

Having more women in municipal roles also influences female representation at higher levels of government, she said.

"Often it's the municipal office that's been the training ground," she said. "We will be affecting the number of women who will be offering provincially and federally."

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