

**Workshop focuses on enticing women into politics**  
**Laura Jean Grant, Cape Breton Post**  
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Sydney - Who ever heard of a mayor who's a woman?

It was an innocent question once posed by seven-year-old Tarah to her father, Cape Breton Regional Municipality Mayor John Morgan — but one that underlines a problem delegates of a workshop were looking to address Thursday.

Morgan recalled his daughter's comment during a brief address at the workshop aimed at increasing women's participation in municipal government, held at the Cambridge Suites in Sydney.

"This isn't just a female issue. We have daughters, sisters and wives that we want involved in the process," said Morgan, noting he's always encouraged his daughter to learn about government and be involved in her community.

Despite the relative shortage of women in politics — just 64 women are among the 308 MPs in Parliament following the recent federal election, for example — there are those who continue to buck the trend including New Glasgow Mayor Ann MacLean, who gave the keynote address at the workshop.

MacLean, a Sydney native and past-president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, said she's always been an active volunteer and an advocate for change on issues of importance, but for years never really considered running for office.

"Sometimes, perhaps we see it more as all about politics as opposed to public policy and that needs to change," she said.

MacLean said she decided to enter the political arena at the encouragement of others — something that must be done at local levels everywhere if female participation is to increase.

"It's very important that we encourage both our genders to be part of our democratic process. I think our democracy will improve, I think our public policy will reflect the realities of all our people which means it's better public policy and I think there will also be some social change that's important," she said.

MacLean said some of the things women have identified as barriers to getting involved in government include inadequate information about how to become involved, family responsibilities, feelings that they can get more done as a volunteer and assumptions by some that they are unelectable.

"It's time we challenge these perceptions," she said.

CBRM Deputy Mayor Claire Detheridge, a veteran municipal councillor, welcomed those in attendance Thursday highlighting the problem by noting that while women represent over half the population only 21 per cent of municipal councillors in Nova Scotia and across Canada are women.

“We will be doing everything we can to get more women involved in municipal government,” she said. “I hope we can make a difference.”

The workshop was co-hosted by the FCM and the CBRM. The Cape Breton County Economic Development Authority and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities were sponsors of the event.

The FCM is conducting similar workshops across the country as part of national effort to generate awareness about the issue and to gather input before developing a national strategy.