

Political Maneuvers: Enticing more women to get involved in municipal politics - BY SARAH REGAN, TRANSCONTINENTAL MEDIA
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Who could forget the criticism MP Belinda Stronach got when she crossed the floor. How about when she broke it off with Peter MacKay and started dating Toronto Maple Leafs star Tie Domi. Or when she dyed her blond locks brown (gasp).

A fear of media scrutiny is the number one reason there are fewer women involved in municipal politics than men, says Anna Allan, chair of the Women in Local Government Project.

Although more than 50 per cent of Nova Scotians are women, only 21 per cent of municipal councillors are women, and only five per cent are mayors. In fact, Nova Scotia has the second lowest number of women in politics, behind Saskatchewan, which has the least. "Just the other day Hilary Clinton was making a speech and in the front row there were men holding up signs saying 'Iron my shirts'," says Allan, who is also the mayor of Windsor. "Women don't want to live in a fish bowl. It's tough for women. There is still the mindset that women shouldn't be in politics and when they are they get crucified. Men don't get that as much."

In an effort to get more women involved in local politics, the Women in Local Government Project will host the first Municipal Campaign School for Women at the Nova Scotia Community College Pictou Campus. The school will be held on Saturday, May 31, at 3:30 p.m.

The program will teach 35 women the basics of municipal politics. They will learn how to run a campaign and will even go door to door where local hired actors will test them on what they learned.

The purpose is to get potential candidates ready for the 2008 municipal, which takes place on October 18. "Believe me, you have to be ready for whatever is on the other side of that door," says Allan. "Sometimes you come across very supportive people and sometimes you don't."

Denise Taylor, councillor for the Town of Stellarton, says she would like to see more women involved in local municipal government. She is currently one of only five serving in local government. "With my colleagues, gender doesn't really enter into it," says Taylor. "My children are grown, so it is a bit easier that way. But I can see it being very time consuming for a woman who has small children."

The Municipal Campaign School for Women will also offer subsidy to help offset the costs required for childcare, eldercare or special needs for those who want to attend the program. For registration information contact the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities office at 902-423-8673.
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