

**CFUW ONTARIO COUNCIL  
Legislation Committee Meeting  
Report of the March 25, 2017**

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**Act Locally: Advocating at the Municipal Level**

Our afternoon guest was Toronto City Councillor Janet Davis, Beaches - East York, a mixed income ward with challenges common within many municipalities. A councillor since 2003, Janet is known as a strong supporter of city services that promote healthy, safe communities, including child care services. Prior to her career as Councillor, Janet was instrumental in developing child care at the Toronto District School Board. Her expertise and background in Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) enabled us to build on the theme of the morning guest speaker, Shannon Fuller, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Years Division, Ministry of Education.

Councillor Davis provided:

- an overview of the complexities and disadvantages of Canada's existing funding system;
- current challenges in providing social services, in particular ELCC, at the municipal level; and
- insight into the workings of municipal politics.

**Social Services Funding Overview**

Janet Davis began with an overview of the erratic history of child care funding and policy, both federally and provincially, constantly impacted by change in government. Cooperative federalism, as spelled out in the **British North America Act**, now **Constitution Act**, Sections 91 and 92, results in a very complex funding system at risk at the federal level by political swings. Currently block funding is provided to provinces for services such as child care, social assistance and housing under Canada Health and Social Transfer. If funding to the provinces is reduced, costs are downloaded to the municipalities.

**Delivery of Social Services**

Services are delivered at the Municipal level, and most municipalities are experiencing growth; Ontario directs funding to regional governments such as Waterloo, Hamilton and Ottawa. The municipality must provide the social services mandated by the provincial government in spite of funding delays.

Provincial ELCC funding is based on child population. Over the next five years, Toronto should receive funding to establish approximately 30,000 of the 100,000 child care spaces, age birth to 4. Of course, parents must still bare the cost once established.

In addition, the province requires all boards to provide after school care for all children aged 4 - 12. By April this year, Toronto will begin receiving funding to start harmonizing the various programs, such as middle childhood programs and child and family centres.

Councillor Davis discussed some challenges facing Toronto:

- sustainable funding is needed;
- increasing the number of subsidized spaces which has slipped since 2010;
- the dilemma of providing care for the middle years, defined as ages 6 to 12, as care in schools must be non profit.

Which organizations can fill in beyond Boys and Girls Clubs and the Y? Toronto does have the **Middle Childhood Strategy** and an accompanying **Implementation Plan** as guidance. She referred to Toronto Children's Services **Growing Toronto's Licensed Child Care System** report for additional

information. Check your city's plans. There will be children's services and / or child care service plans available to consult and even influence through advocacy.

Proposed budget cuts to the Child Care Occupancy Grant provided to the Toronto Board of Education, which would have increased the costs for parents, is a good example of service delivery challenges. This counterbalanced the good news that there would be funding for additional subsidized spaces. Shifting funds from one budget line to another does not build a sustainable, integrated ELCC system. The cuts were successfully fought against by parents, community groups and councillors such as Janet Davis. This serves as an example of a typical opportunity to advocate based on CFUW policy and underscores the importance of being informed at the local level.

### **Navigating Municipal Politics**

Although the budget process is protracted, other business moves very quickly at the municipal level. Any councillor can add an item to the council meeting agenda, and all agenda items are addressed.

In Toronto, there are often upwards of 500 agenda items a month. Voting records are available to the public, leaving councillors accountable. Municipal politics are non partisan; there are no 'whipped votes', and many issues do not fall along partisan lines. Some councillors do openly align with political parties so there are cases of specific issues where alliances are formed across party lines.

In Toronto, the Executive Committee is made up of the mayor and the standing committee chairs and members of the Executive, unlike the other councillors, are expected to 'toe the line' when voting. For any given issue, there are usually swing votes; identifying and connecting with these councillors can be effective.

One should also keep in mind that councillors are very focused on their constituencies and attuned to the voice and concerns of their constituents. This also holds for the mayor who needs your direct vote to remain in office. Consider a meeting with your mayor or councillor and attending council or committee meetings and public consultations, including the budget meetings. For background research, most municipalities provide online ward data and municipal reports on specific issues can be requested.

Most important, advocacy groups have to establish credibility, which Janet feels CFUW has. It is also useful to develop a broad set of allies, including faith groups, that are often involved in local advocacy for housing, shelters, child care, etc.

For additional tips and strategies, consult ***Act On It - Locally: Connecting with Local Politicians and Partners***, one of the guides in CFUW National's **Advocacy Toolkit**, available through both the CFUW Member Resources Website and the Ontario Council website on the Club Resources page, under Advocacy Tools <http://www.cfuwontocouncil.ca/club-resources.html>