

Role of the Municipal Government - or Does it have a Role?

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Background:

A quick (and superficial) overview of Canadian Governance:

FEDERAL Government:

Goal: 'Peace, order and good government'

- Unlimited taxing powers
- Responsibilities: international (foreign affairs, trade) and national (military, postal service, R.C.M.P., criminal law etc.)

Sometimes wanders from its stated jurisdictional responsibilities to encroach on Provincial and territorial.

PROVINCIAL, TERRITORIAL Governments:

Goal: 'Peace, order and good government' within their geographic boundaries

- Limited taxing powers
- Responsibilities: health care, education, highways, policing (O.P.P.), etc.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (rather than just municipalities) which comprise of:

- Regional governments
- Counties (which embrace villages and townships)
- Municipalities, cities and towns

Taxing powers limited and at the mercy of the provincial government. Revenue from property taxes, licences, etc.

ROLE OF MUNICIPALITIES vis-a-vis CFUW ADVOCACY

This level, generally, is the first direct contact for citizens. Local governments administer many social programs legislated by the province. (Note, 'passed' legislation does not necessarily come into effect upon Royal Assent, it may need to be 'proclaimed' hence there may be a time lag before legislation comes into effect.)

The municipality is the level of government closest to the people. It provides most of our services with increasing responsibilities, yet it has the least amount of control and very limited taxing powers. For example, municipalities are involved with emergency services, police, fire, transportation, recreation, sewer, water, libraries, hospitals, social services,

child care service management, historical societies, community centers, home care social assistance, social housing, zoning and land use, waste management, road, and more. Many of these responsibilities are shared with the provinces and territories, but the local government is the front line.

Grassroots, community involvement has been central to CFUW clubs since our founding. Communities are at the root of change. Politicians at all levels know this, which is why they respond best to local pressure, particularly from respected community groups.

The PUBLIC POLICIES that CFUW has developed over time with the passage of Resolutions at various AGMS:

Child Care:

There has been a long-time effort to get the federal government to pass a National Child Care Act. This would ensure a national standard and hopefully more federal funding. Currently Ontario partially funds this program. Quebec has a complete program funded mainly by the province.

The MUNICIPAL ROLE is to administer this program and partially fund it. There is reluctance by many councils to spend more money to meet the need for more spaces and increase rates. CFUW could encourage more women to run for local government positions, lobby councils and through local government organizations, lobby the provincial governments.

Education:

The province has jurisdiction. There is limited local government (Boards of Education) control. Trustees, (for the public and separate systems) are elected locally. Funded by the local Boards and the province. Again, CFUW could encourage more women to run for the office of Trustee.

Other public policies:

Many of the other public policies of CFUW can be supported at the local level, not only by municipalities but also Conservation Authorities (environmental issues) whose Board members are appointees of the municipalities in the relevant water shed.

Food inspection, at the local level, is administered by Public Health. Its Board also has municipal representation and offers an opportunity to voice concerns. A recent Resolution raised concerns about the amount of sodium in prepared foods. This issue has now been addressed but the Public Health system is open to suggestions about improvements re food safety.

Heritage is generally raised as a local issue concerning land use or preservation of a heritage site. There is opportunity at the municipal level to voice concerns, write letters etc. to municipal councillors.

Poverty is most visible at the municipal level. Municipalities have some jurisdictional authority through zoning regulations, housing standards legislation and a voice at the provincial level to criticize poor programs that are not effective. CFUW can support municipal efforts to improve these programs and increase badly-needed funding.

WORKING WITH MUNICIPALITIES

CFUW's support for elected officials at the local level can bring about improvements at our own doorsteps. Knowing your local councillor or being your local councillor brings much-needed support to the municipal level. We can advocate at the local level. The municipalities play an important role in being the first gate-keeper to initiate and support positive change.

Contact information: Check the website for your town, city, county or region for contact information for the elected officials, meeting times.

When writing to Council - address it to Mayor (Reeve/Warden/Regional Chair) and Councillors. At the municipal level, a mayor should be addressed as His/Her Worship (full name), Mayor of..., and the salutation should be Dear Sir/Madam.

In order to have **an item on the Agenda**, check with the City Clerk or Town Clerk. Deputations, or oral presentations, to Council concerning specific issues on the agenda, request to appear as a delegation – check with your City Clerk or Town Clerk