



TOWN OF GIBSONS

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TALK OF THE TOWN – Charlene SanJenko

Since 2011, I have been honoured to be part of Gibsons' Council team of five decision-makers and the only woman to participate in Council decisions on behalf of my community during the past three and a half years. As the end of my second term on Council nears, I would be remiss if I didn't share my thoughts on the importance of women's involvement in leading our community forward.

Bringing a variety of perspectives, backgrounds, energy and experiences is key to the health of any Council. In many instances, women listen and communicate differently than men, a fact my colleague, Christina Benty, the former Mayor of Golden, BC, recently underscored.

"This is not a value judgment on either gender," she said. "However, research demonstrates that female leaders tend to have higher degrees of emotional intelligence than their male counterparts. They demonstrate open and honest communication and value relational currency, and let's face it, nothing ever gets done without either."

According to the FCM (Federation of Canadian Municipalities) website, the United Nations defines 30 per cent as the minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women's concerns.

We have some work to do. Currently, women in Canada represent 18% of mayors and 28% of councillors, for an average of 26% in municipal government. In absolute terms, of 24,113 elected officials, 5,926 are women. That means that to reach the 30% target, Canada needs to add 1,408 women to elected office – or roughly 100 every year for the next 14 years.

Let's bring this back home to our community and why increasing women's participation in local government is important to Gibsons. Sharing from my own experience, three of my top reasons would be:

- Role modelling: How are we publicly demonstrating a positive example to the girls and young women in our community?
- Healthy decision-making: How are we ensuring a variety of perspectives at our decision-making tables?
- A sense of belonging: How are we instilling a deep sense of belonging within the members of our community? Belonging begins with community involvement and participation.

I believe our community needs more women and their skills, ideas and energy in order to reach its fullest potential – if not on Council, then on boards, volunteer committees, community working groups and advisories. My challenge to local women: What are you ready for?

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"Nature is our most valuable asset"