**Women Work for Cities, Why Aren’t Cities Working for Women ?**

**What can we do with women and girls to make cities work for everyone ?**

**I would like to congratulate the Mayors, Councillors, staff, academics, women’s organizations and friends of Turkey who have gathered us here to learn from their work and to share ours so that we can create cities that work for everyone. These ideas and examples will give hope and passion to the young and create worlds we can only dream of seeing.**

**I would like to congratulate the United Nations for its support of this concept and in providing the skills and funding necessary to ensure it has the time to come to fruition in cities.**

My story is the story of how City Councils and women’s organizations can work together for change.

When I was first elected a Vancouver City Councillor in 2002, according to Utne Reader Vancouver, Canada was the #1 City in the world.

I knew that Vancouver wasn’t the number one city in the world for women and girls. I knew that it wasn’t true because only 25% of Canadian City Councillors were women, in Vancouver we only had 20% and there had never been anything but white male mayors in the 125 year history of Vancouver. None of our policy, programs, budgets, funding or staffing had been examined or implemented with a gender lens. There were no role models for women. The consequences have been enormous in terms of social, economic, environmental and creative potential of our city. The dreams, potential, work and energy of the women and girls our city were untapped. The history of aboriginal women and girls unmapped and their needs unaddressed. Our streets, buildings, transit and housing were not designed with the women who use them in them in mind so they were inefficient if not dangerous. 69 women in the Downtown Eastside core went missing and their remains were discovered buried at a farm just outside Vancouver even though women had been talking to the police about these women for years. Violence against women although publicly opposed was common inside as well as outside the home.

When a group of people are weak or marginalized they are vulnerable to the worst abuses which remain unspoken and invisible. Most of those women who went missing and were found murdered were aboriginal. The City budget had never put a gender lens on its’ spending or its funding policies nor did it have a participatory budget. Public transit was expensive and transit at night was infrequent and unsafe. There were few and only expensive childcare spaces for parents. Immigrant and refugee women were often unable to find affordable, culturally appropriate English as a Second Language classes or even community centres. Streets, public buildings and spaces were named after white Anglo Saxon men. Lesbians, transsexuals, seniors, and differently abled women faced discrimination in housing, jobs, and faced the highest levels of violence.

“ Social inclusion is a national challenge to the integrity and continuity of Canada. The capacity of urban communities in every region of the country to provide conditions of wellbeing for all citizens across the life cycle, to recognize and value differences among peoples of global diversities and origins, and to live a common life of proximity and vitality will define Canada to itself and to the world.

” — (Clutterbuck and Novick 2003,32)

These were some of issues crippling our city that I and many others knew that we had to face and address and we had to do it with all the different sectors of society that saw cities as critical to the future of our country and the status of women.

Today people in Vancouver are beginning to understand that the design of housing, transit, streets and buildings are not women friendly. Young women and seniors can’t afford the housing and their incomes are too low. Women earn 71 Cents to the $1.00 a man earns. City policies to make Vancouver the Greenest City in the World by 2020 don’t have a gender lens even though it is women who do the recycling, women who train the children to make environmentally friendly decisions, women who make 80% of the business decision in the home which include whether to buy environmentally friendly appliances, drive or walk their kids to school and whether to use environmentally friendly products.

Vancouver doesn’t have a gender lens on its emergency preparedness plan yet in Fukushima women died after the tsunami because they were invisible workers as housewives in the home taking care of the children and their elders. In Japan it was the housewives who stopped the environmental movement in its tracks because they said they refused to do any more unpaid work such as recycling. But today the women of Fukushima are part of the teams working to redesign the new communities arising in Fukushima because they rose up outraged and demanded to be at those tables. Without a gender lens on the work of cities, cities don’t work well.

Women work at every level of government and yet are not in a majority in the senior levels of government, management or unions. Women work in the public and private sector but their wages are not equal to men. We wonder why. In order to make cities work for women we have to address both women’s paid and our unpaid work. Women are unpaid volunteers in their neighbourhoods and in many public institutions. They are unpaid mothers and with an aging population, caring for the elderly. Yet they do not have a say in how their cities work. Yet without their paid and unpaid work neighbourhoods and cities would not work at all. Cities are falling apart because of the unrecognized roles and potential of women and girls.

What can Mayors and Councillors do ?

When I was first elected to Vancouver City Council I was constantly asking staff and Council if they had put a gender lens on their work because the terrible errors in the policy and programmes became apparent if you put a intersectional/equity lens on the work.

Our Story

I want to tell you the story of how we began to show how the City of Vancouver was not working at an enormous cost to the city and how we began to make the City of Vancouver work. We worked within government and we reached out to work to engage the community. Slowly we started to educate and motivate every level of the government.

In 2003 there were only two women city councillors so we decided to set up a very diverse Women’s Task Force representing many cultural backgrounds, ages, classes and neighborhoods to discuss and research why cities weren’t working for women. We wrote the “Gender Equality Strategy for the City of Vancouver”. From that report three years later the first Women’s Advisory Committee to Council was set up.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities produced “Cities Tailored to Women” and “Femmes et Villes” produced the Safer Cities for Women Strategy which included the Safe Cities Audit. Other cities around the world were beginning to talk about how to make cities work for women. I took these documents to the World Urban Forum in Barcelona and met EU women who were working on some wonderful projects.

I worked with the Deputy City Manager and we pulled together the heads of every department and started to work on gender budgeting.

In 2009 a group of women decided to create an organization that would be cochaired by a City Councillor and the Chair of the Women’s Advisory Committee. Our plan was to host a day long conference the day before all the Canadian municipalities met in Vancouver for the Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities /FCM. We knew that elected women from all across Canada would be attending because they were paid to attend the FCM so they could attend our conference.

We decided in order to change the ways cities worked we would have to work with **five key groups. We needed electeds, women’s organizations, unions, urbanists, academics and we added one other key group the Media**. It became the NGO called Women Transforming Cities International Society and was formally launched in the Vancouver City Hall Council Chambers with the same full diversity of women that live in Vancouver: aboriginal, South Asian, Japanese, Chinese, young, old, heterosexual, lesbian, mothers, daughter, the young and the old.

As we began work on our national conference we began to realize it wasn’t enough to put a gender lens on our work. We needed to put an “intersectional” lens on all our work so that we could see how policies and programs worked for women who were diverse in race, culture, income, age, ability, immigrations status, sexual orientation and language.

**“The term “intersectionality” comes from the women’s movement and first appeared in an article (Crenshaw 1989) on the exclusion of African American women from women’s equality struggles. The concept gained considerable popularity through the work of sociologist P.H. Collins (1990) who argued that patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but bound together. The concept of intersectionality can be applied to all people as a way to understand how power is unequally distributed in society. “ Advancing Equity and Inclusion for Municipalities “**

**Patricia Hill Collins said that intersectionality must be rooted in social justice to succeed.**

An intersectional lens means we recognize women and girls as diverse groups who have distinct and varying needs. For example most of the women who went missing and were found murdered at the farm were very low income, indigenous, young, sex trade workers. For those reasons the police and others were not taking the disappearances seriously. Had they been wealthy, white, professionals the murderer would have been caught years before and many lives would have been saved.

We wanted our organization to be deeply rooted in neighbourhoods so that we would know what was happening for those women, what they were doing and what they knew would make their lives work. Women Transforming Cities began to hold monthly Cafes in local neighbourhoods to engage the community to discuss what the key issues were for local women. We discovered that although cities are the closest level of government to women, women didn’t know the differences between local government, provincial or federal governments responsibilities.

We decided at each Cafe we would always have a two or three women who were knowlegeable in the subject, always have tea, coffee and treats, always have the women seated at small tables where they could discuss the issues after the speaker with some key questions that addressed the issue,

always have one table in a language other than English given the diverse nature of Vancouver,

always have each group make recommendations which they would share with the larger group

and we always put the recommendations up on our website which we hope you will visit.

Often we partner with other organizations. We have just had our 25th Café and we have one planned for July 6 so that I can share what I have learned about what is happening in Turkey.

Everyone is very excited to learn about the Women Friendly City Project and we are very eager to learn from you. We think the idea of getting Mayors to sign a commitment statement is a strong practical step forward.

Our National Conference was a huge sold out success. It was very diverse, it had the five key groups of electeds, women’s groups, academics, unions, urbanists plus the media. The President of the FCM spoke at the conference, we had great workshops put on by young women, housing advocates, anti violence activists.

At the end of the conference we handed out Best Practice awards to organizations that were examples of Best Practices for women and girls in cities. We put all the recommendations up on our website so that they could be shared with others. The Spanish Group who is presenting at this conference was one of the winners. We were concerned that there was very little information about women in cities in the industrialized world although there are now four website in Canada: City for All Women Initiative, Toronto Women’s Alliance and Femmes Et Villes so we use our website to share our learnings. Everyone went away with a different concept of cities and the role of women and girls in cities. People were beginning to understand what an intersectional lens could do to make cities work for everyone. One Councillor who is now a Member of Parliament came up to me and said he had to completely change the way he saw the world. Cities were no longer just about a gender neutral concepts of roads, bridges, public spaces, housing and transit. Concepts of cities now had a dimension that could address the problems disrupting its fabric. Homelessness, violence, engagement, racism, loneliness, integration of immigrants and refugees, gangs, isolation, unemployment, importance of strong neighbourhoods etc. could be understood and addressed by having women at the table.

From that original concept of a national conference we expanded our website, started a monthly newsletter, set up a Facebook page to share examples from around the world, circulated the urban\_woman list serve, began to blog, do more and more media interviews, attend key demonstrations that related to our concerns, speak at events and at City Council meetings. Despite the fact we were now an NGO we continued to have our monthly meetings at City Hall. We now needed to press our demands.

The municipal election was planned for Nov. 2014. We decided to pull together all the recommendations and partners with expertise in women’s issues from the Conference and the Cafes to discuss what we could do to shape the election. We wanted to get the parties and all the candidates to commit to specific actions on the key issues that had emerged at the conference and at the Cafes.

We chose 11 key issues that would make cities work for women and girls. For each issue we had a one page backgrounder which is on our website explaining why that issue was so important citing other documents and links where people could find more information.

We called our Campaign the “HOT PINK PAPER CAMPAIGN” and created this flyer, which asked everyone to

“Commit to making this city better for everyone” VOTE Saturday Nov. 15/14. We dressed in pink and launched the campaign on the steps of City Hall. We took the flyer and the backgrounders into City Hall and gave them to the Mayor and Council.

The first key ask was for the parties and candidates to commit to create and use an equity/intersectional lens framework for policy development and evaluation and to collect data that reflected the diversity of women and girls and their needs.

The other 10 issues were :

Aboriginal Women and Girls

Electoral reform

Young women and girls

Environment

Immigrants

Violence against women and girls

Adequate affordable housing

Transit

Quality affordable childcare

Women, wages and work

We specifically asked that they commit to “Transforming the Experiences of Aboriginal Women and Girls and that they make a commitment to:

\*require leaders and all those who interact and work directly or indirectly with Aboriginal women and girls to develop culturally safe approaches o services

\*Review the core funding requirements of services specifically for Aboriginal women and girls and enhance their compatibility with Aboriginal approaches to social development strategies

\*Ensure funding requirements emphasize program sustainability

\*Award grants to increase the number of culture, community, identity and capacity building projects by Aboriginal women and girls.

We asked that candidates and parties make a commitment to:

\*Review green policies through an equity/intersectional lens that includes all womens work and responsibilities

\* Increase women’s and girls’ access to recreation and community centres, and playing fields, including dedicated spaces and programmes

We asked candidates and parties to make a commitment to:

* Make Vancouver a Sanctuary City for all women and girls regardless of immigration status
* Appoint an immigrant advocate to highlight important issues and solutions for newcomers and engage their participation in the decision-making process

We asked them to

* to develop and implement a comprehensive Violence Against Women and Girls Civic Action Plan
* Provide a fully accessible, centrally located Women’s Hub
* Work collaboratively and effectively with both the Provincial and Federal Government to end violence against women and girls

We asked them to

* Generate a housing strategy that addresses the distinctive and diverse housing and homeless circumstances of women and girls, such as vulnerability to violence, income inequality and family responsibilities
* Implement sustainable low-income housing options that focus on women and children
* Request that the federal and provincial governments reinvest resources toward housing strategy development, and housing supply and maintenance, with a focus on supporting the diverse housing needs of women and girls

We asked them to

* to create and maintain safe, accessible, affordable public transit
* Make Vancouver a free transit zone after dark
* Improve transit in off-peak hours, including late night transit service

We asked them to

* Work with communities to promote the $10/Day Child Care Plan
* Tell the provincial and federal governments that Vancouver expects the $10/Day Child Care Plan to be implemented in BC

We asked them to

* Make the City a living wage employer, requiring that all contractors hired by the City pay a living wage
* Amend the City’s Ethical Purchasing Policy to make living wages a selection factor in awarding contracts
* Expand public transit services and provide safe transportation to all workers at times when there is no public transportation
* Hire, train and maintain women for jobs where they are under-represented
* Formally recognize unpaid and volunteer work

We asked them to :

* Run at least 50% women representing the diversity of our cities and ensuring Aboriginal candidates
* Establish a ward system(Elected representation by neighbourhood)
* Establish campaign spending and donations limits and disclosure of all campaign donations

Finally

We asked all parties and candidates to :

\* Create a young women’s committee to address gender-specific barriers to leadership and promote active civic engagement

\* Establish Youth Hubs to provide better access to services, information and safe spaces to gather; reinstate the CitizenU program so youth can combat discrimination and oppression in their communities

\* Lower the municipal voting age to 16 to establish and maintain youth representation and civic engagement

We distributed this flyer to the Mayor and Council at all candidates meetings, on street corners, at markets, by email, Facebook, Twitter, through our partners, in the media etc. We reached hundreds of thousands of people and all the parties agreed to the majority of the recommendations. We put a report card on each party and each candidate on our website showing what they had committed to doing.

#FierceVoices is our latest project to get young women engaged in the discussions that would make cities work for them. The young women on our Board and that we mentor decided to do two Cafes talking about young women in the media and then a forum which was cosponsored by a local university, called #FierceVoices IGNITE! Young Women Making Media. They wanted to create a space for young women using media. Since so many young women use social media and are used and abused by social and mass media it was an event to inspire, amplify and celebrate young women’s voices through media. It focused on both analyzing representation in media and building capacity for young women to create their own voices and media platforms. The event aimed to especially highlight marginalized voices, voices that are silenced in mainstream media. It was highly successful event because of the diversity of voices from representing the diversity of Canadian youth social media leaders with an indigenous youth leader storyteller and poet to queer “Youth for a Change” to Philippino, Chinese, South Asia and other youth activists. They are planning to continue to meet to discuss other ways to strengthen the voices of young women and we will continue to support them as they create their own organizations.

Another way we are sharing examples of BEST PRACTICES from around the world which we now call WISE Practices, is to hold an awards competition this year which will highlight municipal work with youth. We have a special stream of awards for indigenous youth projects. We hope that some of you will apply. Our last Best Practice Awards were awarded to a group in Spain Col ect Punto which is represented at this conference and in Peru as well as local groups. We will be organizing a Café in Vancouver with one of their members.

As we have built our understanding of what works to make cities work for women and girls working within city hall and deep in the community and we have also partnered with other Canadian cities to share our work and to share our knowledge with all Canadian municipalities.

**We were invited to partner with the City for All Women Initiative in Ottawa with other Canadian cities and other NGO’s to create a manual for municipalities called :**

**“Advancing Equity and Inclusion A Guide for Municipalities”.**

This document, which was launched two days ago on June 9/15 in Ottawa the capital of Canada, will now be circulated to all municipalities with the support of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. We will be doing workshops across Canada to share how to use this guide. This guide explains how an intersectional lens exposes the lives of all women and girls as we as other citizens that are usually invisible or marginalized in cities and it shows how cities can use an intersectional lens. The document outlines how to make cities work for everyone.

The document gives examples of Best Practices from Cities across Canada that show how they have worked to engage all citizens from many different communities. It has exercises and references to research, websites, the work of other organizations. It has ways of analyzing a problem in a city, the cause and possible soluntions. As 80% of our population live in Cities and are changing the fabric of our cities this document is key to enabling those cities to meet the challenges.

The document is specifically developed for

• Elected officials who wish to create Council mandates and strategic priorities that are responsive to constituents;

• Senior and middle management who seek to establish policies, practices, and procedures in human resources and operations that reflect the population; and,

• Municipal staff at all levels of the organization who may be in touch with emerging issues and opportunities.

It will also be useful for

• Local organizations, community organizers, unions, and academics who partner, collaborate, and advocate with municipal governments to achieve greater inclusion.

The Guide is based on key principles that are intended to inspire you to move forward.

CHANGE IS ONGOING

Municipalities are transforming as a result of growing populations, immigrant settlement, aging demographics, rural residents moving to cities, and other demographic and socioeconomic shifts. Change is also happening within municipal governments themselves as they adjust to the dynamic contexts of their work, aging infrastructures, and declining financial resources. Successfully navigating change involves recognizing that it is the norm to adapt to what is going on around us.

DIVERSITY IS STRENGTH

Bringing together diverse perspectives and experiences increases the quality of municipal decisions and actions. Supporting diverse communities and a diverse workforce means tapping into all of the skills, talents, and creativity available to us.

COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITIES

When municipalities listen to, and work alongside, communities they can harness energy and resources to make lasting change possible. The greatest impacts come from collective efforts to understand the issues, map out strategies, and take action

The document has a wonderful “Environmental Scan CheckList”

for City Political Structures, Operations, Participation and Partnership Structures and Mechanisms and Human Resources with which municipalities can analyze and grade their entire system in order to see what is being done and how well as well as to see what isn’t yet being done and what needs to be learned from other cities.

Advancing Equity and Inclusion a Guide for Municipalities is on the Women Transforming Cities. org website and on the Cities for All Women Initiative website.

Women Transforming Cities continues to hold Cafes every month covering a wide range of topics and responding to requests from women to address new topics. In the fall we will do Cafes on women who work at night, what would mother friendly cities look like and one on the naming of spaces in cities.

This fall we will ask the electeds to show publically what they have done to implement their commitments to the Hot Pink Paper.

We have been asked to participate in the UN Habitat Urban Thinkers Campuses in Qito, Equador to workshop our success in shaping the discourse about what cities really look like, how to assess the needs of women and girls in cities by using an intersectional lens and to present WISE Practices for women and girls in cities.

We know that to make our cities strong, healthy, as well as socially and economically successful we must address the issues of all people. I am sorry our documents are in English but I hope you will be able to access them and use them in the important work that you are doing. We hope to be able some of the exciting WISE practices that you have shared with us at this conference.

It has been a powerful conference. We all know what is at stake. Our cities are in trouble and we can advance our cities by addressing many of those problems by bringing women into the discussions, creating solutions and implementing the programmes. Every city can use an intersectional lens on their politics, policies, programmes, finances and staffing. We also need to share our WISE practices.

Will the UN take up the challenge to set up WISE PRACTICES AWARDS for the Number ONE CITY IN THE WORLD FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS ?

Which city here today will take up the challenge to become the BEST or WISEST CITY IN THE WORLD FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS ?

**It is a privilege and an honour to be at this conference and to learn from all your work here and around the world.**

**I will bring your learnings and your practices back to share with my Canadian colleagues.**

**Thank you very much**

Ellen Woodsworth Founder and Chair of Women Transforming Cities International Society