

COUNCILLOR TANEEN RUDYK (CANADA/THE AMERICAS)



Ms Taneen Rudyk is a Councillor for Vegreville, Alberta and President of the Federation of Canada Municipalities.

What made you decide to enter local government?

I was already a very active volunteer in my local community and when someone asked me to run, I considered the opportunity seriously. I had always known I would want to run “someday” but the direct ask made me think that now was the time to make the world better, right where I lived.

What has been your most rewarding experience as a councillor/leader/local government practitioner?

There are so many to choose from. I enjoy driving around my town and seeing the impact of governance decisions on the community. Whether it is meeting future leaders at our schools, working collaboratively with small business owners to grow our local economy, creating bylaws that reflect sustainability goals, assisting the library board in creating interactive programming for families, advocating to other orders of government about pressing issues, or even something as fundamental as addressing our residents’ concerns about road maintenance. I’ve enjoyed feeling like my work matters to the people who live here now, and those that will in the future.

What advice would you give to other women considering entering local government?

Do it! Assemble your support group—your family, your friends, your neighbours—and run! The opportunity to add your intuition and wisdom to the task of shaping future communities will be transformative and is deeply needed.

Why do you think it is important to increase the number and voice of women in local government?

It is absolutely crucial to expand the perspectives at local government tables by increasing the number and variety of voices. Here is a practical example that illustrates the invisible barriers than can exist to bringing those voices in: the traditional timing for council meetings in many communities is in the evening, which presumes that local elected officials are retired men without family responsibilities. I am happy to say that many communities are adopting a shift of meeting times to a blend of daytime and evening gatherings. It’s taken some time to change the culture, but our staff also value the acknowledgement of work/life balance.

As a woman, what has been your biggest hurdle in becoming a councillor – and in your daily public life?

In practical terms, elected officials in smaller municipalities are not well compensated, so it has been a challenge to do work I really value while not feeling valued financially. Additionally, there are many occasions where I know my contributions are overlooked and talked over and then adopted by another speaker as their own. Learning how to choose my battles and when to assert power has been a challenge. Local government is truly a long game and while, as governors, we are ultimately looking ahead to the end result, it isn't easy when trying to balance personal life tasks, professional disrespect, and systemic imbalance.

What has helped you the most to continue in your role?

Support from my husband, our parents, our children, and our friends. I simply could not have worked in this role without the acknowledgement that some days are going to be a race from beginning to end and I cannot do it alone. And a few practical tips...calendar management and meal planning have been beneficial to keep on top of all the things I have to do, as well as the things I want to do.

As a councillor/leader in your community, how can digital technology be used to increase women's political inclusion?

The ability to join meetings virtually has been incredibly helpful for me in a smaller community. The importance of being able to access the world via technology was never more evident than during the pandemic, as rural and remote communities needed access to educational, medical, entrepreneurial tools and those without the tools to connect were seriously hampered. Truly the ability to unify and amplify female voices through the use of simple technology is powerful.