



International Women's Day



Women in Governance: A Candid Conversation



Panelist Biographies

Jan Vilaca, Moderator

Owner, Tasty Road Trips Inc.

Jan Vilaca is a part-time college educator at Conestoga College, specializing in business administration and entrepreneurship & innovation, across multiple campuses. Additionally, she leads an innovative online business membership platform named the Build it Big Resource Network, which was developed under her company *Create Your Virtual Influence Coaching and Consulting*. Her business offers professional development resources, coaching, and consulting with a focus on supporting entrepreneurs who desire building multiple revenue streams, while creating strategic efficiencies. As a certified Success Coach, Jan is also a career development coach practitioner with Inkblot Therapy, an EAP provider of services for Green Shield.



Outside academia and coaching, Jan is the founder and CEO of Tasty Road Trips Inc., an award-winning culinary tourism experience business which aims to shine a bright light on small towns with big tastes in rural Ontario. When not plugged in to business, Jan embraces a simple lifestyle on her 100-acre farm in Brant, demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting local and fostering sustainable lifestyle practices.



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Linda Hunt

City of Brantford Councillor

Linda Hunt is an Award-Winning Accessibility Consultant, Speaker, and Author. She is the CEO of Accessibility Solutions, an accessibility consulting firm that aids businesses and organizations to remedy barriers for people with disabilities. She is also the host of the Accessibility Solutions podcast.

Linda is the Treasurer of Citizens with Disabilities – Ontario. A member of The Rick Hansen Foundation– Accessibility Professional Network. She is also a Certified Community Champion on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

Linda was elected to Brantford City Council in 2022. She is the first person with a physical disability to be elected as Brantford City Councillor.

Linda first became a person with a disability in 2004, and since then she has become an advocate for all things related to accessibility.

Linda has more than 30 years of experience in senior management roles in the public, private and not-for profit sectors. Based in Brantford, Ontario, Linda and her husband, Greg, have operated their own business Grelin Apparel Graphics for over 30 years.





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Diana Huson, MA MBA

Regional Councillor
Town of Pelham | Niagara Region

Diana Huson was first elected to public office in 2018 becoming first woman to both run and hold the position of Regional Councillor in Pelham. She was re-elected in 2022, where she will serve her second term on Niagara Regional Council. She is a passionate advocate for supporting local business and economic development, social policies that benefit seniors and families, protecting and enhancing Niagara's natural heritage, and also creating a more equitable and inclusive governance model in the interests of better policy-making and representation of marginalized voices.



Diana has worked in both the private and public sector for a number of organizations in addition to running her own communications consultancy business. She worked at Brock University for 15 years in operations and governance and is currently the Director of Marketing and Communications with Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

She is a graduate of Brock University having an MBA in Marketing and an MA in Political Science (Public Policy). Diana was successfully elected to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in 2020 and re-appointed in 2022 where she engages with other municipal leaders across Canada to set policy priorities on a national level.

She created the Region's first Women's Advisory Committee last term and was instrumental in delivering the Region's Seat at the Table program which aimed to create awareness and support for women and diverse voices who had an interest in running in the last municipal election.



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Emily McIntosh

Director of CONTACT
Community Services

Emily initiated 'The Women of Ontario Say No' in late August 2022 as a direct response to the need for accountability of municipally elected representatives with respect to perpetrating violence and harassment, as evidenced in her hometown of Barrie, ON. The non-partisan movement has since grown exponentially (building on the efforts of many stakeholders previously) to garner the support of various provincial organizations including AMCTO, Ontario Big City Mayors, Rural Ontario Municipal



Association, Association of Municipalities of Ontario. 202 municipalities (and growing) have passed a motion of support calling on government to pass legislation, including The City of Toronto. For more information on the advocacy please visit: thewomenofontariosayno.com

Emily McIntosh was born and raised in Simcoe County. Professionally, Emily is the Executive Director of CONTACT Community Services, a social service agency serving the communities of South Simcoe. Emily is passionate about community development and meaningful community engagement. She currently serves at the Leadership Table for the Coordinated Access System of Homelessness Services in Simcoe County and is Board Vice-Chair for the Community Legal Clinic- Simcoe, Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes.



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Erin O'Hoski

Deputy Chief
Administrative Officer,
The City of St. Catharines

Erin O'Hoski is the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for the City of St. Catharines and has the privilege of working with City Council and an incredible administrative team to deliver services, programs, and projects that matter to the community.

Together with the City's Chief Administrative Officer, Erin oversees City departments with a combined annual operating budget of \$118 million and an asset portfolio worth \$7.2 billion. She is directly responsible for corporate strategy, leadership, and supporting the City's public facing service teams including Fire Services; Planning, Building and By-law; Community Services; Engineering, Facilities and Environment; and Municipal Works.

With over two decades of experience in the municipal sector, Erin has a proven track record of working with Councils and municipal leaders to successfully develop and implement strategic plans. She is committed to building and leading high performing teams who thrive in a positive work environment.





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Panelist Biographies

Natasha Salonen

Mayor, The Township of Wilmot

Natasha Salonen was elected the first female Mayor of Wilmot in October 2022. Natasha is also the youngest female mayor in Ontario history, being elected at 27. In her role as Mayor, she also serves as a Regional Councillor.

As a first-time politician, Natasha is no stranger to politics, having worked in Federal and Provincial government starting in 2012. Natasha brings professional knowledge from working for various Members of Parliament, most recently being in the Minister's Office at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, before being elected Mayor.

Natasha has a BA in Human Sciences from the University of Oxford, UK, where she was very active in student government. Apart from her years of study abroad, Natasha is a lifelong resident of Wilmot Township, currently residing in her family home in Baden.

In her short time as Mayor Natasha has become an advocate for attainable and accessible housing, fiscal responsibility, youth voice in government, community building, and enhancing the quality and diversity of political candidates.





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Mandy Samwell

City of Brantford Councillor

With over two decades of dedicated service in public health and community development, Mandy brings a wealth of experience and passion to her endeavours. She has been a driving force behind numerous impactful projects and programs aimed at improving the well-being and quality of life for individuals and families within her community.

Mandy was elected to Brantford City Council in 2022 to represent the Ward she has lived in for nearly 30 years. As a dedicated advocate, she works hard to address the diverse needs of her constituents.



Deeply rooted in volunteerism and civic engagement, Mandy has held several leadership roles that demonstrate her exceptional vision and commitment to addressing the needs of her community. Her experience has allowed her to forge strong partnerships and collaborations with stakeholders across sectors, resulting in sustainable positive change. She regularly participates in community events and initiatives, dedicating her time and expertise to uplifting others.

Mandy is proud to have been born and raised in Brantford, Ontario, where she lives with her family.



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Panelist Biographies

Rose Sicoli

City of Brantford Councillor

Rose Sicoli is a business woman in Brantford, known for her roles as a local business owner, real estate professional, and city councillor. Rose demonstrates an entrepreneurial drive and community leadership in all her undertakings. Her commitment to advocating for women's equality and supporting multicultural communities is evident in both her professional and personal endeavors. She is a long-time volunteer and board member with various associations and charities in the community.



Residing in West Brant since 2008, Rose, along with her two children, Haillie-Jade & Sophia, proudly calls the area home, often exploring the city's extensive trail system with her beloved English Bulldog, Coco. With a rich Italian heritage, Rose is dedicated to preserving traditions, promoting family values, and fostering inclusivity within her multicultural community. Her extensive experience, community involvement, and dedication to making a positive impact position her as a trusted advocate and leader.



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Panelist Biographies

Tracy Vaughan

CAO, The Town of Cobourg

Tracey Vaughan joined the Town of Cobourg as the Town's first female Chief Administrative Officer in October 2020, during the height of COVID-19. She has guided the organization through a Service Delivery Review, Organizational Review and most recently the 2023-2027 Town of Cobourg Strategic Plan which focuses on the priorities of a Thriving Town, Service Excellence and Sustainability. Tracey's focus on EDI and culture change have resulted in positive organizational changes, supporting the goal of making the Town of Cobourg an employer of choice.



On the global stage, Tracey took part in The Partnerships for Municipal Innovation – Women in Local Leadership (PMI-WILL) in Sri-Lanka, which is a six-year project that is part of FCM's portfolio of gender equality and women in local government initiatives and was invited to the recent Urban20 (U-20) in Ahmedabad, India to discuss issues facing urban communities across the world.

Tracey has played a prominent role as a member of numerous boards and working groups including—the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants and Refugees, the Social Planning Network of Ontario, the Durham Region Legal Clinic, and the Durham Region Local Diversity and Immigration Partnership Council, to name a few. She also represented Ontario on a national joint policy and program working group with the Federal Government.

In 2012, Tracey was honoured with the prestigious Queen's Diamond Jubilee award in recognition of her achievements in the area community development.