

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Municipal Awareness Week - Engaging Citizens to Make a Difference in their Community

**Halifax, April 16, 2013:** April 22-28 is Municipal Awareness Week. During this time many municipalities across the province will be holding various events and open houses to promote the importance of municipal government and to encourage its citizens to become involved in making a difference in their community.

Municipal government plays an important role in our society and in people's daily lives. Every time you get a drink of tap water, take out the garbage, recycle bottles and plastics, compost your food, flush the toilet, see the police or fire department in action, take a bus, go for a walk in the park, play sports on a ballfield, go skating at an arena...these are all municipal responsibilities!

Municipalities are considered the order of government "closest to the people" because they provide a direct link to civic engagement. There are many ways you as a citizen can have an impact on municipal decisions that impact your community, including:

- attending council meetings and participating on advisory committees set up by the municipality
- providing your opinion directly to council at a public meeting in response to a particular issue
- presenting to council (often through community-based organizations) on issues of importance
- directly contacting your mayor, warden or councillor by phone, email or face-to-face on issues of concern or to obtain information
- voting for your councillor and mayor (where offered) during municipal elections
- running as a candidate in a municipal election.

Municipal elected officials—mayors, wardens and councillors—work hard on your behalf to address specific issues in your district and to make important policy decisions that will benefit

the entire municipality. Council decisions must try to balance the many diverse interests of a community. This is not always easy.

Municipal Awareness Week also aims to engage youth who represent the future leaders of our communities. Municipal decisions have significant impacts on our youth including where to locate recreational facilities, types of recreation programs to offer, and public safety programs offered in conjunction with local schools. To better inform youth, the UNSM has developed a presentation that can be used by municipal officials or teachers in the classroom which outlines the importance and key responsibilities of municipal government as well as how they can get more involved in their community.

Municipal government can provide many interesting career opportunities in the fields of engineering/public works, public protection and safety, recreation, finance, land-use planning, solid waste management, and administration. Given the fact that Nova Scotia's municipalities are facing a number of impending retirements, there will be opportunities to fill these types of positions over the next number of years.

Municipal Awareness Week aims to highlight the many ways you as a citizen can become involved and make a difference in your municipality. In democratic societies such as ours, the ability for local citizens to have an impact on their municipality is a privilege and one that should not be taken for granted. Increased citizen engagement leads to better decision-making at the municipal level.

We are encouraging all municipalities to participate. For events taking place in your area during Municipal Awareness Week, please contact your local municipality. You can also visit the UNSM website at <http://unsm.ca/municipal-awareness-week.html>.

*The UNSM is a non-profit organization that has represented the Provincial interests of municipal governments across Nova Scotia since 1906. Total membership is 407 elected officials representing all 54 municipalities.*