

Kiera Bokvist

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My Experience at the 2018 NCLGA Convention

As a master student in political science at UNBC, I have dedicated my life to the study of politics and answering the question “how should we live together?” Originally from Vancouver Island, I moved to Prince George in 2011 to begin my undergraduate degree in political science. I instantly fell in love with the community and became interested in local government in the north. In the spring of 2018, the City of Prince George offered to sponsor me so I could attend the North Central Local Government Association Convention. I was ecstatic and eager to learn more about northern politics.

Attending this convention was my first time in Fort Nelson and the first time I had travelled that far north. The hospitality of our hosts and the friendliness of the local officials were apparent from the moment I stepped off the plane. The convention had its own small town feel to it as many of the attendees seemed to know each other well already. Everybody made me feel incredibly welcome and everybody seemed eager to have me participate.

On my first day, I was able to attend a healthy communities forum that was run by Northern Health. I found it to be incredibly informative and it opened my eyes to the different organizations that work together to build our northern communities. The second day I was able to see more of the community and experience the outdoors and wildlife on a trip to Liard River Hot Springs. I saw many animals that I had not seen before, such as buffalo, and I was able to visit a famous BC landmark. Furthermore, the bus ride allowed me to connect with northern

local officials and learn about the work they do for their communities and hear about their personal career paths. It was a fun and informative day.

There were also a variety of presentations I was able to attend. One discussed the legalization of marijuana and the ramifications that it has for our communities. Another presentation by Northern Development Initiative Trust CEO, Joel McKay, discussed publicity and revealed a handbook that he wrote for local officials to help navigate public relations. His presentation inspired me to alter how I am writing my master's thesis to make it more accessible for local governments and so that the information can be made more practical and usable. Finally, the banquet featured great food and entertainment and gave me an opportunity to socialize with local officials and learn from their experiences. I was also incredibly proud of my community when Prince George received an award for how it handled the wildfires of 2017 and all the evacuees who came to our city.

Overall, attending NCLGA was a great learning opportunity and it enabled me to learn about the functions of local government. It inspired me to seek a career in the north in municipal government after I graduate from my master's degree in the spring of 2019. I was very grateful for this opportunity and I appreciate how the City of Prince George has enable students like me to become more involved in politics.

Thank you,

Kiera Bokvist

Emilio G. Caputo

Summary of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities

8 October 2018

What I can say for certain is that my experience as a Student Delegate at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities was life-altering, not only in its teachable moments, but for its capacity to inspire me to pursue a career in politics. My time in Halifax was defined by two things: the networking potential and the educational value. What I have discovered in these is that change happens locally.

My week in Halifax began a day early, giving myself time to discover the city on my own terms. That same night, I had the chance to meet the members of the Prince George City Council. I found it incredibly valuable to get to know them so personally over dinner, and I feel that this is a tradition that should continue. It gave me the ability to find familiar faces in a daunting atmosphere full of political professionals. When the conference truly began, I was initially overwhelmed by the itinerary. I scheduled my days as full as I could and found myself bouncing from room to room for nearly twelve hours a day as I tried to make the most of the opportunity I was given. This was a great choice, and while I missed out on time to socialize, I was able to learn and network in the sessions I attended.

Of these sessions, there were a few that stood out to me most. I quite liked the ability to hear from each of the national party leaders, as their dialogue catered to the interests of municipalities, which is far removed from their usual rhetoric. I was also particularly interested in issues of poverty reduction and affordable housing and found myself in those sessions frequently. I learned that most strategies for affordable housing rely on private investment, though cities have the opportunity to become investors themselves, which in turn alleviates some of the challenges to affordable living. Another topic of interest was that of racial and other identities, which found itself weaved into many of the conversations. It is interesting to see how issues of social justice find themselves worked into legislation. One example is that of Africville, which was a community of African-Canadians who were victims of gentrification in Halifax. While I could continue to list the experiences I found enlightening, I think what is more important is that in all of them, the municipality was at the center of the story. Whether it is

fighting for or against their constituents, councillors have the capacity to enact legislation and influence dialog locally and beyond. It goes to show that municipal leaders have the ability to enact grounded and immediate change that sets precedents far beyond their city's borders.

If there is one thing that I can offer, it is to reiterate David Coletto's mantra, that "demographics are destiny". By this, I mean to say that student engagement is an invaluable asset and indeed, many become the legacy of generations previous. It is with programs like the Student Mentorship Opportunity that allows municipal leaders like yourselves to inspire young minds to be ambitious and pursue positive change. At the conference, as I met other councillors, I found myself to be the only student in attendance, which became a topic of conversation immediately. Many such councillors showed interest in introducing something similar to what Prince George has offered, and in this I see a capacity for the Prince George City Council to be a leader in student engagement nationally.

I was unaware of the opportunities afforded to municipalities in terms of governance prior to the FCM, but I find myself with a newfound desire to use my experience there to better my community. For that, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be a part of Canada's largest gathering of municipal leaders and to share ideas with some of her greatest minds.

Brooklyn Seemann

Youth Municipal Government Mentorship Program Summary

During my week in Whistler I was exposed to the dynamic and vital role that municipal governments and regional districts play for their communities. Local governments are advocates for their residents. The 2018 Union of British Columbia Municipalities conference had a motto of communication, collaboration and cooperation. Throughout the week, I learned how integral and important these factors are to the development of a vibrant and prosperous community.

Intergovernmental relationships are fundamental to building strong communities. As municipal governments are a creature of the provincial government it is necessary for local governments to be able to meet and discuss issues present in their jurisdiction. By having meetings with Provincial Ministers, this allows local governments to speak to issues their community is facing, ask for assistance, advice or thank for prior help. During our week in Whistler we had the opportunity to meet with many Ministers of the provincial government, though these meetings were short, equated to speed dating, I was able to see the significance of the meetings and how important these conversations were for the betterment of our community. Negotiation is a key component for local governments. Communicating with Ministers is integral. The Unions of British Columbia Municipalities conference allowed for communication between local governments as well. This allowed for leading communities to share their best practices in diverse areas of local government and gave inspiration and ideas for other municipalities to take home. In addition, top professionals in different fields such as green innovation were able to present feasible ideas that can be practiced in any community.

Collaboration took place throughout the week at the Union of British Columbia's Municipalities conference. Local governments collaborate with many different sectors to bring opportunities to their region. I witnessed collaboration between the City of Prince George with the health sector, ministries and business sector, to name a few. Furthermore, during my week I observed the diverse relationships built between our community and major local industrial employers such as with CN Rail. Prince George is an industrial hub, by creating strong relationships with industry this provides our

community with jobs and economic opportunities. By attending the conference local government were able to collaborate with each one another as well. Officials from different areas are brought together and provided an opportunity to seek assistance, mentorship and education from each other. I thought this was so important for community growth.

Cooperation was demonstrated during my week in Whistler through the fostering of relationships with the provincial government. By working together on concerns, it allows for the best options to be discovered and the most equitable decisions to be made, increasing the social, economic and overall well-being for British Columbians and visitors alike. What I found most fascinating during my week spend with the City of Prince George staff and elected officials at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities conference was how connected our local government is to the community and how many areas it helps to facilitate and support. This opportunity provided me with a new understanding of the importance of local government.