



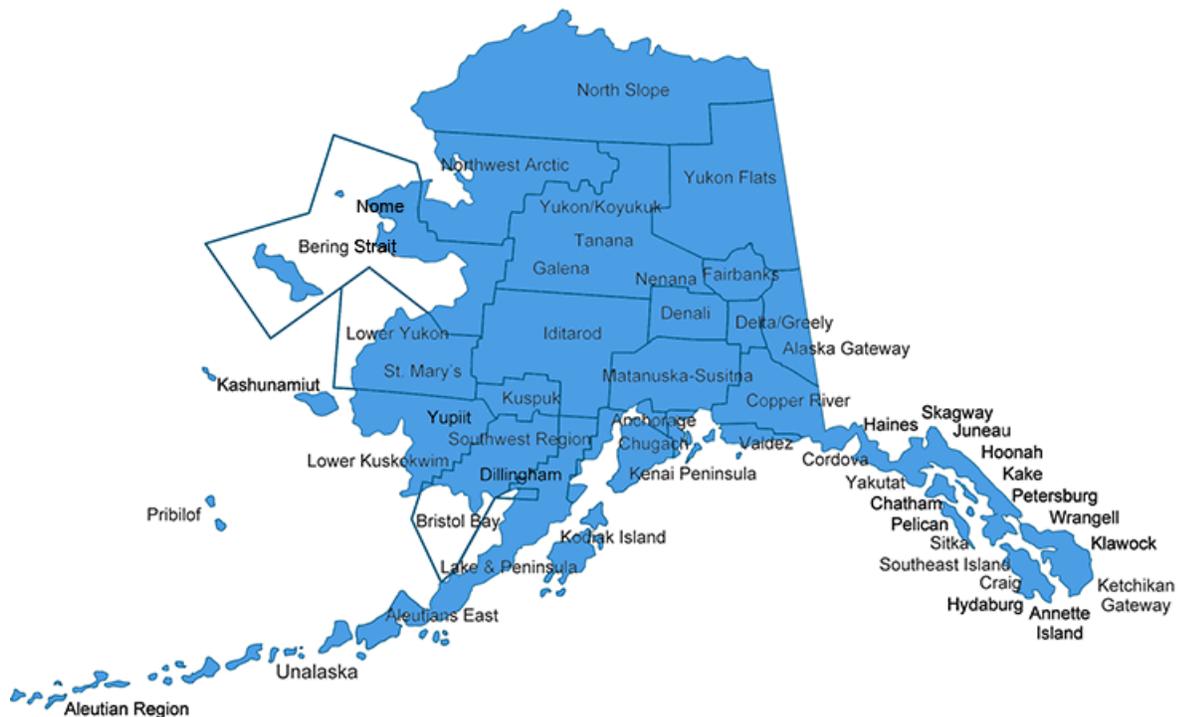
(2014 Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks conference in Anchorage)

Roll Call: Gender and the Alaska Municipal Clerk

Krista Kielsmeier, Drake University

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(Map from Alaska Department of Education & Early Development, n.d.)

“No other office in the municipal service has so many contacts. It serves the mayor, the city council, the city manager (when there is one), and all the administrative departments without exception. All of them call upon it, almost daily, for some service or information. Its work is not spectacular but it demands versatility, alertness, accuracy, and no end of patience. The public does not realize how many loose ends of city administration this office pulls together.”

William Bennett Munro, *Municipal Administration* (1934, p. 95)

Roll Call: Gender and the Alaska Municipal Clerk

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Abstract

Attendance at an Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks conference makes the gender disparity of the profession readily apparent. What caused this disparity, and what is its impact? A statewide municipal officials directory indicates approximately 90 percent of clerks in Alaska are female. That informal tally reflects the lack of public information available on this topic. Cases and interviews focused on the Kenai Peninsula and Southeast Alaska reveal barriers that impact clerks' opportunities to earn promotions and fair pay, especially in small municipalities that place a clerk in the interim municipal manager role in response to vacancies. The historical bias of clerking as "women's work" contributes to inadequate pay structures that undercompensate clerks serving as interim managers. These clerks face indefinite, repeat terms of interim service with little leverage against abuse. Clerks in an interim role or seeking a permanent promotion also might have non-traditional educational backgrounds that conflict with the value of their work experience. More broadly, clerks and other staff members contemplate impacts to family life and organizational attitudes about internal promotion when considering interim and permanent openings. This paper concludes with recommendations for improving the gender balance and fair treatment of Alaska municipal clerks.

Introduction

I joined the Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks (AAMC) in 2014 following my promotion to the deputy clerk position at the Haines Borough in Southeast Alaska. AAMC hosts a conference each November that runs with the Alaska Municipal League Annual Local Government Conference in Anchorage. My first AAMC conference included a one-day Athenian

Dialogue focused on the book *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* by Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg. Prior to that conference, my view of the gender distribution of municipal clerks in Alaska was mostly shaped through the AAMC email list, with woman after woman sending inquiries to fellow clerks statewide. I remember at least one email starting with a greeting to “ladies” and thought, “We can’t all be women.” The conference, though, showed the disproportionate share of women in the profession, with the men in attendance as product vendors or guest speakers.

AAMC started in 1965 with a charter membership of 13 clerks whose “intent was to promote sound local government and the continuing education of municipal clerks throughout the state of Alaska” (Heinz, n.d.). That education covers clerk responsibilities such as preserving historic records and administering elections. Clerks attend AAMC and International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) events to earn continuing education credits. A bulk of training for the Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) or Master Municipal Clerk (MMC) designations occurs at the Northwest Clerks Institute in Washington state, serving clerks from Alaska, Oregon, and Washington. The AAMC website notes “education is a top priority” and the association “provides a forum for discussing the unique challenges commonly faced by Alaska’s municipal clerks” (Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks, n.d.). Given my status as a former AAMC member, participant in a conference dialogue on gender, and pursuer of higher education, I was eager to hear executive board member responses to questions for this paper.

The AAMC executive board has eight members, filling the roles of president; first vice president; second vice president; immediate past president; communication director; education director; secretary; and treasurer. The only man on the board, Aaron M. Rhoades, started as

the city clerk-human resource manager at the City of North Pole (population 2,101) in August 2020. He is the lone board member who does not hold either CMC or MMC designation.

I emailed board members questions about the municipal clerk profession in Alaska, with an emphasis on gender:

1. Why do you think municipal clerks in Alaska (and in general) tend to be female?
2. Do you think a clerk serving as interim borough manager is appropriate or should the organization chart be adjusted in municipalities with this arrangement? Why?
3. Did your clerk professional development experiences ever discuss bringing more men into the profession? How do you think this could be achieved?

Board members apparently communicated with each other to agree on a united response to my questions in personal communications from March 23 to April 1, 2021. I am quoting their responses as a matter of public interest. Two of the statements were nearly identical:

1. "In carrying out our mission and purpose we do not contemplate gender distribution of its [*sic*] members or the hiring practices of the municipalities from in which our members are employed."
2. "AAMC doesn't contemplate the gender distribution of its members or the hiring practices of municipalities."

Other statements were similarly jarring:

- "I wouldn't begin to know how to answer your questions."
- "I have no interest in responding to your questions."
- "I am unavailable to assist with the paper."

- “I’m not comfortable speaking on behalf of AAMC without the consent of the executive board, though, so I can’t participate in your research.”

These responses were a big twist from that day spending hours discussing *Lean In* at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage. I expected AAMC board members to be limited by time constraints due to the wide demands of their jobs, but I had never considered they would refuse to answer the questions. Without AAMC cooperation, I lacked information on the organization’s overall gender distribution. I was hesitant to contact other clerks throughout the state due to concerns about putting them in a position where they would inadvertently upset their own association by communicating with me. Three respondents for this paper requested and received anonymity, reflecting the perceived sensitivity of topics even without being informed of AAMC’s position.

I searched in other areas for more context on AAMC membership and mission. The spring 2021 AAMC *Oracle* newsletter mentions the organization receiving 100 membership applications this year. The most traditionally gendered reference in the publication is to a “Tupperware Party” to raise money for scholarships (2021, p. 2). The AAMC Memorial Scholarship covers the \$350 early conference registration fee and up to \$500 in travel costs. AAMC awards a “Clerk of the Year” dating back to 2000. All the recipients appear to have been women (see Figure 1) based on my assumptions about their gender relying on first names, general familiarity with recent AAMC leadership, and online searches of Facebook profiles, media articles, and municipal websites (Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks, 2020). The most recent honoree, Melissa Jacobsen of the City of Homer (population 5,443), won the award in a year she served as AAMC president. Rhoades, the male clerk on the board, is second vice

president and on a path to one day serve as president and receive heightened consideration to perhaps become the first man in Alaska selected for the honor.

Figure 1: AAMC “Clerk of the Year” Award Winners

Award Recipients
2020: Melissa Jacobsen, MMC, City of Homer
2019: Kacie Paxton, MMC, Ketchikan Gateway Borough
2018: Nova Javier, MMC, Kodiak Island Borough
2017: Jamie Newman, MMC, City of Wasilla
2016: Johni Blankenship, MMC, Kenai Peninsula Borough
2015: Debra Marlar, MMC, City of Kodiak
2014: Jo Johnson, MMC, City of Homer
2013: Katy Suiter, MMC, City of Ketchikan
2012: Janey Hovenden, MMC, City of Fairbanks
2011: Laurie Sica, MMC, City & Borough of Juneau
2010: Jean Lewis, CMC, City of Seward
2009: Sheri Pierce, MMC, City of Valdez
2008: Colleen Ingman, MMC, City and Borough of Sitka
2007: Marjorie Harris, CMC, Municipality of Skagway
2006: Kristie Smithers, MMC, City of Wasilla
2005: No Recipient Awarded
2004: Bertha Panigeo, CMC, North Slope Borough
2003: Sandra Dillon, CMC, Matanuska-Susitna Borough
2002: Linda Murphy, MMC, Kenai Peninsula Borough
2001: Mary Calhoun, CMC, City of Homer
2000: Mona Lisa Drexler, CMC, Fairbanks North Star Borough

Source: Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks (2020)

One benefit of the municipal clerk role that should transcend gender is job security, at least in terms of resistance to budget cuts that would eliminate the position. Alaska Statute 29.20.380 requires municipalities to have a clerk (or clerk-treasurer). Statute includes a 10-item list of responsibilities (see Table 1) along with the standard “perform other duties required by law, the governing body, or the chief administrator” (State of Alaska, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, 2020, p. 46).

Table 1: Alaska Statute 29.20.380 Municipal Clerk Responsibilities

Attend meetings of the governing body and its boards and committees as required and keep the journal	Have custody of the official municipal seal	Assure that notice and other requirements for public meetings are complied with and assure that public records are available for public inspection as required by law	Manage municipal records and develop retention schedules and procedures for inventory, storage, and destruction of records as necessary	Maintain an indexed file of all permanent municipal records, provide for codification of ordinances, and authenticate or certify records as necessary
Prepare agendas and agenda packets as required by the governing body	Administer all municipal elections	Assure that the municipality complies with 42 U.S.C. 1971-1974 (Voting Rights Act of 1965, as amended)	Take oaths, affirmations, and acknowledgements as necessary	Act as the parliamentary advisor to the governing body

Source: State of Alaska, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (2020)

Historical Bias of “Women’s Work”

The question of historical impact and why Alaska municipal clerks are disproportionately female could be the subject of its own paper. A cursory explanation is available in the article an AAMC member who is not on the board sent me that references a 1989 paper by Sharon Hartman Strom on office work becoming “women’s work” in the early 1900s (Gershon, 2015):

Strom writes that one of the big turning points for women’s clerical employment came during the Civil War. Male labor was scarce, so the government began hiring women for office jobs. After the war, it kept the practice partly because it could pay women less.

Under federal law in 1866, the maximum salary for women was \$900 a year, compared with a ceiling between \$1,200 and \$1,800 for men. Private employers followed, and a

gender division slowly emerged within clerical work. Women were more often hired for structured, mechanized tasks.

Strom's described "division of labor" continues in the present day, "with routine jobs for women and more interesting work with promotion opportunities for men" (Gershon, 2015).

Neutrality vs. Advocacy

Alaska statute makes no reference to the neutrality of the clerk position. However, the AAMC handbook includes the IIMC Code of Ethics that calls for members to subscribe to the principle to "be ever mindful of my neutrality and impartiality, rendering equal service to all and to extend the same treatment I wish to receive myself" (Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks, 2012). Clerk neutrality is a result of the position's role to assist city council and borough assembly members of all political persuasions and objectively manage elections. A perceived lack of neutrality could lead to a costly election challenge for a municipality.

Acknowledging their specified job responsibilities, AAMC board members might feel limited in their ability to respond to questions regarding a politically sensitive topic like gender in the workplace. AAMC, though, certainly plays a role in legislative advocacy and activism. The message from AAMC president Jamie Heinz of the City of Kenai (population 6,999) that opens the most recent newsletter (2021, p. 1) summarizes a board action in the political arena:

We sent a letter opposing Section 22 of Senate Bill 39 to the Senate President and sponsor of Senate Bill 39. This section would have amended Title 29 by restricting municipalities which are subject to Title 29 from mailing a general or special election ballot to a voter unless the voter affirmatively requests to vote by mail in that election.

We heard from several municipalities that this would negatively affect them and we felt

it important to inform the Senate of our opposition and to remind them that Article X of the Alaska Constitution provides for maximum local self-government and a liberal construction given to the powers of local government units.

AAMC board members weighed in on this controversial issue due to their expertise in running elections. The organization has an official legislative committee. According to a newsletter update from committee chair Beth McEwen, the group meets every other Tuesday, reflecting a high level of legislative engagement. McEwen's report referenced AAMC's opposition to Senate Bill 39 and listed "Session Bills we are watching" (2021, p. 10). These bills center on COVID-19 response, the state's Open Meetings Act, and alcoholic beverage control. McEwen, the city clerk for the state capital of Juneau (population 32,247), also listed elections-related bills addressing campaign finance, election investigations, and ballots.

Tallying a Gender Estimate

Despite their ongoing legislative advocacy, AAMC board members avoided the gender topic when I sought their input. I instead turned to the Alaska Municipal League (AML) when trying to track down gender distribution numbers. AML is a nonprofit organization representing 165 cities, boroughs, and unified municipalities. The AML website lists affiliate organizations, including AAMC and the Alaska Association of Municipal Attorneys; Alaska Municipal Management Association; Alaska Government Finance Officers Association; Alaska Association of Assessing Officers; and Alaska Fire Chiefs Association. Affiliates and the Alaska Conference of Mayors hold annual meetings during the AML conference, with an estimated 1,000 attendees. About 400 municipal officials participate in the AML proceedings "to learn, network and address challenges together" (Alaska Municipal League, n.d.). That portion of the overall

conference features the annual business meeting with board of director elections and adoption of a legislative position statement and resolutions.

AML, based in Juneau, has much greater resources than AAMC. For example, AML employs an executive director and seven other staff members. In contrast, the typical AAMC executive board member is employed full-time at a municipality and balances regular work responsibilities with an AAMC role. AML uses its resources to serve as an information repository for the state. Two of its major publications are an annual municipal officials directory and a local government salary and benefit survey, which shows clerk is a six-figure position in multiple municipalities. For example, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough (population 13,843) lists the salary at \$109,772 (Alaska Municipal League, 2020). The lowest starting salary in the survey is \$14 an hour for the municipalities of Aniak (population 485), Goodnews Bay (population 283), and Toksook Bay (population 683); the Aniak position has a finance director job title but is listed in the “Clerk-Municipal” table (Alaska Municipal League, 2020, p. 23).

The 2021 Alaska Municipal Officials Directory is a 184-page booklet that allows for the best estimate of the gender distribution of municipal clerks in Alaska. The opening message from AML executive director Nils Andreassen cautions that “no two municipalities are alike” as they have “added or excluded powers based on their circumstance and the public interest” (Alaska Municipal League, 2021, p. 2). The publication lists 19 boroughs and 146 cities, with the Metlakatla Indian Community among the cities. Boroughs are the Alaska equivalent of counties, but they can cover thousands of square miles in territory and be combined with a city. Comparison across boroughs and cities can be haphazard due to the job titles of top administrators depending on whether the municipality has a council-manager or mayor-council

form of government. However, the Title 29 statute requiring a city clerk makes that position a constant across the booklet’s pages.

In my examination of the AML directory, I found approximately 90 percent of municipal clerks in Alaska are female, including 18 out of 19 in boroughs. The first male clerk is on page 33, from the City and Borough of Yakutat. The 90 percent number is a rough estimate; I used 152 as the denominator due to several municipalities having clerk vacancies. I again made assumptions about gender based on names and online searches. My estimate shown in Table 2 includes only two male clerks statewide in communities with more than 1,000 people based on AML population figures. The first is AAMC board member Rhoades from the City of North Pole. The second is Bryant Hammond from the City of Nome.

Table 2: Male Municipal Clerks in AML Officials Directory

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Clerk Name</u>
City of Nome	3,662	Bryant
City of North Pole	2,101	Aaron
City of Kwethluk	819	Samuel
City and Borough of Yakutat	540	Alfredo
City of Fort Yukon	540	Robert
City of New Stuyahok	496	Mathias
City of Brevig Mission	462	Hans
City of Angoon	410	Albert
City of Saint Michael	398	Richard
City of Eek	347	Fritz
City of Ambler	287	Brian
City of White Mountain	194	Jonah
City of Nondalton	129	Brenton
City of Port Heiden	119	Shane
City of Chignik	98	Andrew
City of Nikolai	91	Winchell
City of Shageluk	84	Jared
City of Whale Pass	57	Randy

Source: Alaska Municipal League (2021)

The Male Perspective

I sent questions to Rhoades and Hammond, but neither responded with comments for attribution. Rhoades, as mentioned earlier, is a “city clerk-human resource manager,” a job title with potentially less gender-based stigma than just “city clerk.” Hammond is a longtime city clerk with CMC designation (Alaska Municipal League, 2021). When I attended the 2014 AAMC conference and asked about the existence of male clerks, his name was the one to come up. A notable observation is that the City of Nome website shows that two out of the three employees in the clerk’s office are male; Jeremy Jacobson is an administrative assistant and Christine Piscoya is Hammond’s deputy clerk (City of Nome, n.d.). Hammond’s employment as a clerk, like Rhoades’ job title, might reduce the stigma of the role and office as “for women.”

With Rhoades and Hammond unavailable, I turned to Scott Stauffer, city recorder for the City of Milwaukie in Oregon, for comment; recorders are the equivalent to municipal clerks in Oregon. By my recollection, Stauffer was the lone man to receive training as part of the Professional Development II session that was part of the Northwest Clerks Institute in June 2016. I attended this several-day training at the University of Puget Sound in Washington, and I remember hearing the good-natured greeting, “Good morning, ladies and gentleman,” to acknowledge Stauffer’s singular status. I requested gender distribution numbers from the IIMC, Northwest Clerks Institute, and International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and did not receive any information. Two of the three agencies acknowledged receipt of my request and did not follow up, and the other did not respond at all.

Stauffer, age 37 and a graduate of Oregon State University with a master’s degree in public policy, said he does not recall any professional development discussions specifically

focusing on bringing more men into the profession (S. Stauffer, personal communication, March 24, 2021). “I know we talked several times about how the position often gets pushed around and overlooked because women usually fill it,” he said. Stauffer said some of the gender imbalance is likely due to confusion about the role’s responsibilities and authority:

I think that’s largely because in many cities the role is seen as a secretary, the note taker and administrative person for the governing body, not necessarily a decision maker – roles which, unfortunately, many women were put in by dominating white men. I think that view of the position perhaps subconsciously continues to this day and is something that needs to be re-evaluated as society progresses, although I know in most cities the recorder actually wields more influence than might be guessed by looking at the organization chart.

Stauffer said he feels more pressure to be involved in statewide recorder activities because his gender “makes me stand out” and “my colleagues notice me more because of it.” He added, “I don’t have negative feelings associated with it – although I have found it interesting that I have not yet built any good connections with the few other men in our profession.” The Oregon Association of Municipal Recordors website (n.d.) lists him as the Region II director representing four counties; he is the only male director among the seven regions. Stauffer estimated that “over 90 percent” of Oregon recorders are women.

Gender and the Alaska Municipal Manager

My 90 percent number for Alaska reflects an estimate that 134 of 152 municipalities in the AML directory have a female clerk, with 13 vacancies. Some municipalities list more than one clerk. The estimate is not intended to be precise but to provide a rough number beyond my

anecdotal experience of sitting in a conference room in Anchorage. Given the much larger number of female clerks in the pool, I am more likely to have made errors in mistakenly attributing clerks to the female column. These errors would slightly inflate the female percentage, but the directory clearly shows the vast majority of municipal clerks in Alaska are female. AAMC membership goes beyond just clerks listed in the booklet, including lower-level positions at municipalities. AAMC data would be quite useful for members to self-disclose gender and take the guesswork out of estimates. The same would go for all AML affiliates.

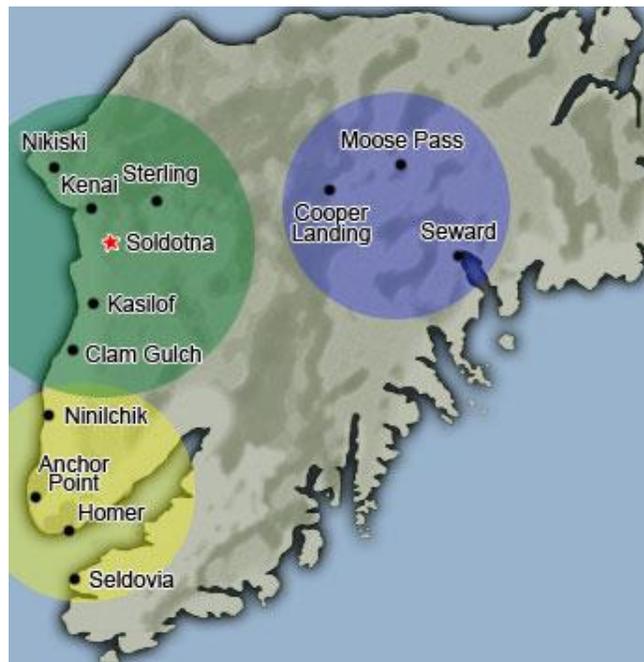
A comparison of the percentage of female municipal clerks to the percentage of female municipal managers using the directory is difficult due to the varying job titles at municipalities. For example, looking just at the 19 boroughs, there are 12 managers; two administrators; one chief of staff; one chief of staff/administrator; and three municipalities with clerks listed as the top employee. Like AAMC, the Alaska Municipal Management Association (AMMA) does not track the gender distribution of its members, and membership would go beyond employees listed in the AML directory. “We don’t have a currently updated AMMA membership list, but I pulled one I had from last fall and tallied 36 (45 percent) female managers/administrators compared to 44 (55 percent) male,” said Stephanie Queen, AMMA secretary/treasurer and manager for the City of Soldotna (S. Queen, personal communication, April 6, 2021). Four of the six AMMA board members are women, including Queen and the president, vice president, and past president.

Queen, 39, moved up to the city manager position in Soldotna (population 4,327) after serving a decade as the director of the city’s planning and economic development department. Tying back to the example of the Nome city clerk and an administrative assistant there being

male, Queen’s comments indicate the importance of regional impact (see Figure 2) on gender in the workplace:

For the three years I’ve been a city manager, the number of female city managers down on the Kenai Peninsula have outnumbered men. When I was hired, Homer, Seldovia, and Soldotna all had female city managers, and Kenai and Seward had men. Now we’re tied at 2-2 (Kenai and Homer have men, Seldovia and Soldotna still female) and just last week the Seward City Council announced they’re moving forward to offer the position to Janette Bower, who is a former clerk herself, so women will outnumber the men, again. In this context, it feels incredibly “normal” to have women city managers.

Figure 2: Soldotna and the Kenai Peninsula



Source: Soldotna Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center (n.d.)

Bower, the incoming Seward city manager, illustrates the sometimes-winding path to the top of Alaska municipalities. She is the only former clerk profiled in this paper to reach a manager position, and that promotion first required a few years in Minnesota. Bower served as

a clerk in Palmer and Bethel in Alaska, where she was an active AAMC member. She left the state for a city administrator position in Menahga, Minnesota. Bower moved on to a city administrator role in Wadena, Minnesota, before committing to a return to Alaska. The City of Seward (population 2,729) appeared poised to hire a female manager, having offered the job to Erin Reinders of the City of Unalaska (population 4,592) in 2019. “I think it is time we had a woman,” said one public commenter quoted in the *Seward Journal* (2019) at the meeting the Seward City Council selected Reinders as manager. “We have the chance to have a very qualified woman to be our city manager.”

Reinders is an extreme example of the struggle of some Alaska government employees to garner enough city council respect to make a run at a manager position in their current municipality. Reinders was a planning director and assistant city manager in Unalaska before twice applying for that municipality’s manager job. She was a finalist both times, but the council went with other candidates, both men, who went on to short tenures. Reinders then ventured out and landed a job offer from Seward, prompting a response from Unalaska. “This time, councilors offered the job to Reinders without a wider search, citing her experience with the city and commitment to the community,” radio station KUCB reported (Kraegel, 2019). Reinders turned down the Seward job for a \$172,500 salary in Unalaska, plus a \$15,000 signing bonus.

Mismatched Educational Backgrounds

Both Queen and Reinders have master’s degrees (Queen in engineering from Cornell University and Reinders in urban affairs and public policy from the University of Delaware). Bower is an ICMA Credentialed Manager and does not list educational history on her LinkedIn profile (Bower, n.d.). Clerks who apply for an internal promotion to manager might lack the

traditional educational attainment expected for the position, such as a master's degree in public administration. City councils, then, must weigh the value of practical experience. Melissa Jacobsen, the "Clerk of the Year" and past AAMC president mentioned previously, is MMC certified and has served the City of Homer since 2004. When she applied for the city's manager position, the council interviewed her and expressed concern about her lack of higher education (Pacer, 2020):

In a follow-up question about qualifications for the job of city manager, council member Joey Evensen asked how Jacobsen would respond to those who might think she is not as qualified as some of the other candidates. Jacobsen has a high school diploma but not a college degree. She cited her commitment to lifelong learning and the myriad professional development sources and opportunities she's pursued over her career.

"I feel like I have an education," she said. "It's maybe not a traditional education. It didn't work out for me in my younger years to go to college ... I appreciate the question and I understand the concern, but I also feel that there are other ways to achieve appropriate education to be a local government professional that maybe don't include a bachelor's degree in college."

The Homer City Council selected Rob Dumouchel as manager. Dumouchel previously worked for the City of Eureka in California, where he was the interim director of development services and a planning and building manager. Dumouchel has a master's degree in environmental and natural resource sciences from Humboldt State University.

While AAMC respondents for this paper indicated the organization "doesn't contemplate" municipal hiring practices, the AAMC website lists a goal "to provide the means

to support and empower members in fulfilling and discharging their official duties” (Alaska Association of Municipal Clerks, n.d.). A question is whether this empowerment extends to clerks applying for manager positions. Does AAMC have an advocacy role to play when one of its members is publicly questioned about a lack of qualifications for a job? Likewise, should AAMC take a stand in support of members with lengthy terms as interim manager who are then passed over for the permanent role?

Case Study – Organizational Culture and Internal Promotion at the Haines Borough

When the Haines Borough (population 2,480) advertised for a borough clerk in 2018, the posted minimum salary was \$54,080. The position, though, has often been the top-paying job held by a woman at the borough and is slated to pay \$79,040 in the next fiscal year (Haines Borough, 2021a). The minimum educational requirements in the job posting were a high school diploma or equivalent, with a “bachelor’s degree, post-secondary course work, and/or municipal clerk certification” preferred; the Haines Borough Assembly could “substitute experience for education” (Haines Borough, 2018). The selected candidate, Alekka Fullerton, had served as deputy clerk at the borough since 2016. The deputy clerk also requires no more than a high school diploma or equivalent for educational attainment.

In contrast, the borough’s 2021 advertisement for a borough manager lists a salary range of \$110,000 to \$140,000. The posting prefers a “degree in public administration, law, finance, engineering, political science, human resources or business administration” but notes “a successful record of increasing responsibility and accomplishment in municipal or governmental administration is given strong consideration in evaluation of applicants” (Haines Borough, 2021a). The clerk and manager postings illustrate how an employee in a small

organization could enter at a low level with minimal education, become influential through years of competent service and promotions, and put a council in a position like clerk Jacobsen did in Homer.

Haines Borough clerk Fullerton, though, has the educational background requested for the manager job. She was an attorney in California with a degree from that state's Hastings College of the Law before moving to Haines with her family. After taking a career break, she re-entered the workforce as deputy clerk and became clerk following Julie Cozzi's retirement from that role. When the assembly fired the borough manager in May 2020, Fullerton started in the interim borough manager position. She led the borough during the COVID-19 pandemic, a near-halt to tourism in the region, and a winter landslide that killed two residents and forced others to evacuate. Fullerton applied for the permanent manager position. As I researched this paper, I assumed her higher level of educational attainment would be the difference in her being offered the job.

In March 2021, the assembly offered the manager job to George Zoukee of Tennessee in a 5-1 vote. After nearly a year at the helm, Fullerton could only secure that one vote for the permanent job. Zoukee has a Master of Business Administration degree from Boston University. The one assembly member to support Fullerton, Gabe Thomas, credited the importance of Fullerton's months fulfilling interim manager responsibilities. "I feel that Alekka's earned my vote due to the services she's provided during these times," Thomas said. "She stepped right up and did the job and just kept doing it, just kept grinding" (Clayton, 2021).

Zoukee lacked recent local government experience and, most importantly, he lacked Alaska experience. He turned down the job offer, citing a \$20,000 estimate just to move his

furniture. “The logistics of the move were a lot harder than I thought with borders being closed and the pandemic,” he told the *Chilkat Valley News*. “It made it a tough time to make that move” (Godinez, 2021b). Fullerton withdrew from consideration soon after, citing concerns about division in the community. “I don’t want there to be an ‘Alekkka’ camp,” she said. “I don’t want there to be an ‘other’ camp, so I am hereby withdrawing my application to be borough manager” (Godinez, 2021c). The assembly has yet to re-post the job opening, and Fullerton still is serving as interim borough manager. Mayor Doug Olerud cautioned the assembly that “we can take our time” in a hiring decision “because this has been almost a year now that this position has been vacant” (Leasia, 2021).

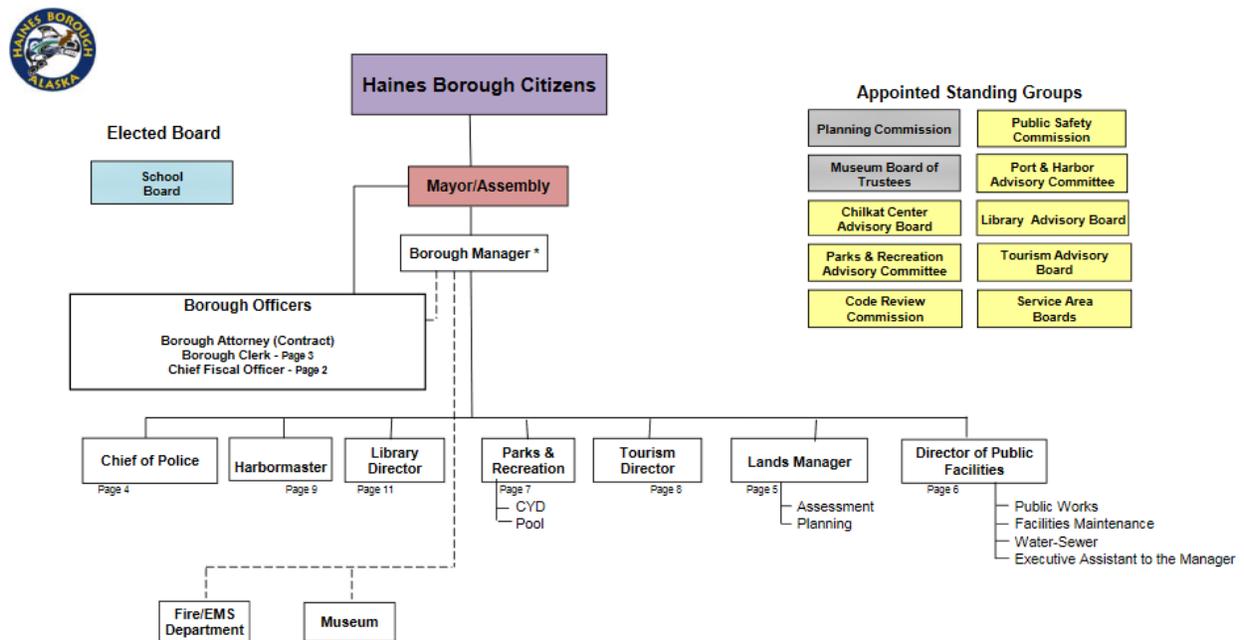
Olerud’s comment fails to acknowledge the potential psychological damage to an employee who must serve in a position following such a public rejection from it. Assembly members should justify to their constituents why they are comfortable having an employee at the helm who has been deemed capable of doing the job temporarily but not permanently. They also should justify to Fullerton why they are comfortable leaving her in the position indefinitely while not promoting her. Where AAMC can step in is to call for increased pay if a clerk’s interim manager service extends past a certain length of time or if a clerk is called upon to serve in the role repeatedly over a stretch of a few years.

Retired clerk Cozzi, 66, served as interim manager in Haines “12-15 different times, with the longest term being six months” (J. Cozzi, personal communication, April 1, 2021). She served as clerk from 2003-2018. Cozzi achieved the MMC certification and attended three years of college but did not complete a bachelor’s degree. The borough organization chart (see Figure 3) for much of her service designated the clerk to fill in as acting and then interim manager

during a permanent manager’s absence. The longer, interim position also warranted a 20 percent increase in pay, but Cozzi said she never had any desire for the permanent job. “I did not for one single moment consider applying for this position, although I was encouraged to,” she said. “I was not interested, because in this particular municipality it is a thankless job and I frankly preferred being the clerk.” Since Cozzi did not apply for the permanent position, the assembly repeatedly put her in an interim role with little complication. Finally, in 2015, she declined to become interim manager yet again. The opening went to Brad Ryan, who joined the borough as director of public facilities earlier that year (Morphet, 2016).

Figure 3: Haines Borough Organization Chart with Clerk as Officer

Haines Borough Organization Chart - Effective September 10, 2019



Source: Haines Borough (2019)

The assembly may have been able to force Cozzi to serve as interim manager but found a suitable option within the current staff. Cozzi, like most high-ranking employees in Haines, was not a union member. Ryan’s director of public facilities job paid more than Cozzi’s as clerk, meaning the 20 percent interim manager raise for Ryan cost the borough more money than if

Cozzi moved up. Ryan's starting salary as interim manager was the equivalent of \$96,000 a year, reflecting his \$80,000 annual pay in the facilities department (Morphet, 2016). Cozzi would have been paid the equivalent of \$83,840 a year as interim manager based on her \$69,867 annual salary shown in that fiscal year's budget document (Haines Borough, 2015). The interim pay formula resulted in a \$12,160 salary difference between the clerk and director of public facilities positions despite Cozzi's extensive experience as interim manager since starting at the municipality in 2003. Her raise would be \$2,027 less than Ryan's.

If the clerk is second ranking in the organization chart, the position should be the second highest-paid or the interim manager salary should be a flat amount not adjusted by each employee's current salary. Otherwise, women are inclined to be paid less for doing the same job, as reflected in the pay rates for Cozzi and Ryan. A female Alaska municipal clerk who commented anonymously for this paper and who, like Cozzi, estimates serving more than a dozen terms as manager, recommended updates to pay arrangements "so that the clerk is not doing such high-level work at such a low hourly wage, especially if they are doing both clerk and manager duties" (Anonymous Clerk 1, personal communication, April 2, 2021). More than a dozen states, including Washington, have passed laws prohibiting employers from asking salary history questions during job interviews. These bans are "part of new pay equity laws and designed to help close the pay gap by stopping new salaries from being set off past ones" (McGregor, 2019).

AAMC should lobby for protections for clerks who are put in an interim manager position they do not enjoy, with little opportunity for advancement due to mismatched educational backgrounds, at a rate of pay well below the value provided. The Haines employee

union appears to have seen long interim stints as an issue; the most recent collective bargaining agreement calls for a 25 percent pay increase for interim roles after 90 calendar days, up from the starting 20 percent (Public Employees Local 71, 2019). An interim manager stint may have a tremendous impact on the mental health of a clerk. The anonymous clerk who commented earlier in this paper also referred to the impact on her family life:

When I fill in as manager, I'm generally doing both the clerk and manager jobs and I'm very, very busy. The boundaries of work and home life blur, and I'm more stressed, less tolerant, and have less time for my family. Family is much more important than my job (I just need to make money to support them, hopefully at a job I mostly enjoy), so if the job negatively affects the family, I don't want it. There is a point when the pay, no matter how high, is not worth it ... Most clerks I know will serve as interim managers and sacrifice their wellbeing simply because they know that if they do not, the efficient functionality of the government would crumble and create more work and strife for everyone.

An area where a clerk needs support is when calling for the commitment of extra funds to handle a manager vacancy when public pressure wants the clerk to take on the role at minimal expense to the taxpayer. "The clerk tends to have a similar body of knowledge about municipal issues, finances, etc., as the manager, and there is a tendency to move the clerk into an interim manager position because it is easy," the anonymous clerk said. The Haines Borough Assembly did make a recent adjustment to provide more support for its clerk in the interim manager role by allowing the hire of a temporary deputy clerk. The borough had left that position vacant since Fullerton's promotion in 2018. Fullerton did not receive that concession

from the assembly until after applying for and being rejected from the permanent job. Another option is to hire an interim manager from outside the organization. The AMMA website currently lists contact information for seven potential interim managers, all men (Alaska Municipal Management Association, 2020).

Fullerton was the second consecutive Haines interim manager to apply for and not receive the permanent job. Ryan, the facilities director, applied in 2017 during his second term in the interim role. Cozzi's longest interim manager stretch was six months in a 15-year clerk career, but Ryan did two terms around that length. The assembly gave him "rave performance reviews" during his first run as interim manager, but he did not apply for the permanent position, citing impact on his family life (Garcia, 2016). The selected manager, a Coast Guard veteran from Florida who grew up in Alaska, was fired six months into the job, and Ryan expressed an interest in serving as interim manager again. The decision to re-appoint him was knotted 3-3, and the mayor broke the tie in favor of Ryan (Ashe, 2017). The opposing assembly members preferred to hire a retired manager from Juneau on the AMMA list. This process and Fullerton's ensuing effort contrast sharply with the City of Unalaska's decision to promote Reinders to manager without conducting a wider search. Of course, Reinders needed an outside job offer first.

Before Ryan's second appointment as interim manager, he emailed assembly members to inform them of his interest in the permanent position. He wrote that impacts to family life were less of a deterrent than in the previous hiring process because "it seems that the transition in leadership has a similar impact to my family life and I believe my previous experience will help bring stability to the borough" (Ryan, 2016). The assembly selected a local

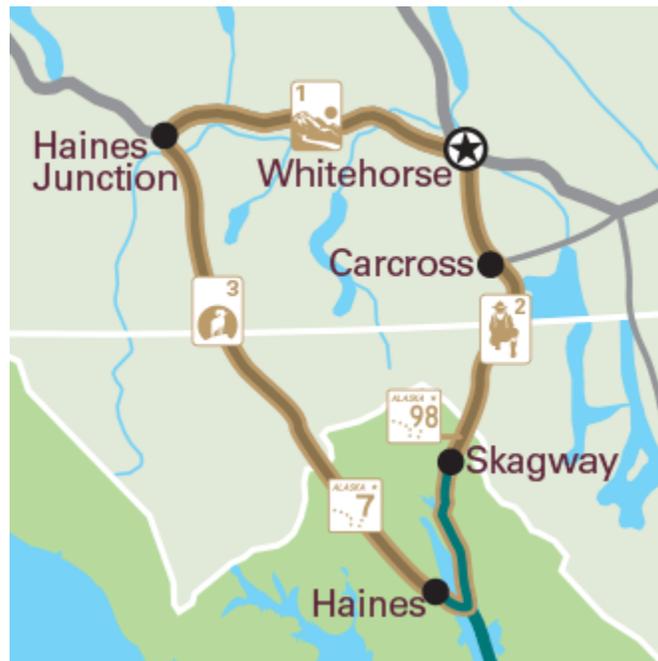
candidate for the permanent manager position, but Ryan was not that local candidate. Instead, the assembly voted to hire a female former assembly member who served as executive director of the Haines Chamber of Commerce. She earned a Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree from the University of Alaska Southeast but, like the two previous permanent hires, had never been a municipal manager. Ryan has a nonprofit management background and earned a doctorate degree in environmental sciences and resources from Portland State University. The assembly terminated the selected manager's employment in May 2020 in another deadlocked vote with the mayor breaking the tie (Clayton, 2020).

Like Reinders, Ryan found more interest outside his current municipality. First, a headhunter recruited him for a borough manager opening in the City of Dillingham (population 2,382). He was offered the position with a \$115,000 salary, dwarfing his pay of about \$86,000 in Haines; Ryan turned the job down but leveraged the offer for a \$7,000 raise (Clayton, 2017). In 2019, he applied for the borough manager opening in the neighboring Municipality of Skagway (population 1,095). The Skagway Borough Assembly unanimously chose him for the job, and he agreed to a \$120,000 salary, with housing provided (Armstrong, 2019). Skagway has a lower population than Haines but its tourism economy is much stronger based on massive cruise ship visitor numbers. According to the AML directory, the Municipality of Skagway has 76 full-time equivalent employees and the Haines Borough has 53 (Alaska Municipal League, 2021).

The Reinders and Ryan cases exemplify the importance of being mobile in a job search. Each turned outside job offers into pay increases. In Alaska, accepting employment in a community a few miles away might require a permanent move. For example, Haines and Skagway are less than 20 miles apart but not directly accessible to each other by road; the trip

requires a 350 mile near-loop on roads and/or travel via plane or ferry (see Figure 4). A study by Sylvia Fuller of the University of British Columbia found married women and women with children “tend to experience less-favorable mobility-wage outcomes” (2008, p. 158). Fuller references studies concluding “jobs entailing geographic moves tend to result in higher wage gains” and “households are less likely to move to facilitate women’s job changes than men’s” (2008, p. 162). Hiring decisions that underplay the value of internal candidates’ experience put women at a disadvantage due to their relative lack of mobility compared to men.

Figure 4: Haines-Skagway “Golden Circle” Route



Source: Skagway Convention & Visitors Bureau (n.d.)

A council or assembly acts as a body when making manager hires, so comments from individual members may not reflect the overall group. However, a post on the personal website of former Haines Borough Assembly member Tom Morphet shows bias against internal candidates. Morphet, former editor and publisher of the *Chilkat Valley News* in Haines, served on the assembly when Ryan applied for the permanent manager job. Morphet supported the

external candidate and did not run for re-election. His March 2021 post addressed the current assembly's decision to offer the job to Zoukee, the candidate from Tennessee, over clerk Fullerton. Morphet wrote, "The most successful managers and administrators in our town's history came from Alaska but from outside Haines" (2021).

Morphet (2021) wrote drawbacks for local candidates are "the baggage of their own political agendas" and "old friends to keep happy or old enemies to keep at bay." He then noted Zoukee, with a resume "short" in "municipal management, Alaska knowledge and small-town savvy," would have to rely heavily on "exceptional clerk" Fullerton to survive in a position with an estimated "average lifespan on the job at 1.8 years." Morphet's scenario would place Fullerton in the role of carrying her replacement to success, but that responsibility is on hold given both candidates have dropped out of the running. When asked to evaluate his strengths and weaknesses as a manager candidate for this paper, Ryan said he thought his experience was a weakness in Haines and a strength in Skagway. "The reason is that when you are the manager you have to tell most people in town 'no' and that gets held against you," he said (B. Ryan, personal communication, March 30, 2021).

Queen, the Soldotna city manager, had more confidence in her council's assessment of her abilities as a manager. She had been a department head for a decade in Soldotna before applying and was interim manager for about four months. "I was aware of the fact that there may be a candidate that could offer more city manager experience than me, but I felt very confident in my knowledge and familiarity with the organization and community," she said (S. Queen, personal communication, April 6, 2021). Queen said mentorships are important "in convincing women that they are ready for this job." She also cited a diverse council as

important in hiring. “Our city council was 50-50 male/female when I was hired, and I believe that makes a difference,” she said. “If a legislative body is less diverse, that may impact who they view as a strong candidate.” A balanced council by gender can still present roadblocks, though, as the Haines Borough Assembly had three men and three women serving when members voted for Zoukee over Fullerton.

Potential Manager/Clerk Partnerships

An area where AAMC and AMMA could partner is in the promotion of flexible work arrangements for employees to improve work-life balance. A female AMMA member commented anonymously for this paper and listed “benefits that tend to be targeted toward working parents” as means to bring more women into the manager profession, including “child care incentives, paid maternity/paternity leave, flexible work hours to accommodate for child care or school schedules” (Anonymous Manager, personal communication, March 31, 2021). Ryan, 51, applied for the Haines manager job while helping raise two children in elementary school. He said impact to family life would be his primary reason for not wanting a manager job. Queen currently has children in elementary school, and her husband works full-time. “Our schedules allow us to cover all the bases, but it would be very difficult for me to have this demanding a job if I didn’t have such a great partner,” she said.

Another potential area of overlap between the two associations is in promoting the creation of assistant manager positions in small municipalities that might be a better fit for some interim manager roles. These positions are common in large municipalities. For example, the Municipality of Anchorage (population 285,634), by far Alaska’s most-populated local government, recently promoted Anna Henderson to the top job from her deputy manager

position. Her highest level of education is a bachelor's degree in accounting (Municipality of Anchorage, n.d.).

The word "assistant" can be notorious in government among fiscally conservative circles, but Ryan is a supporter of the assistant manager role for interim vacancies. "The issue is the clerk is a high-level professional position, and when they fill in as the interim manager the assembly/community is underestimating the importance and amount of work that is required of the municipal clerk," he said (B. Ryan, personal communication, March 30, 2021). However, despite strain during repeat cycles in the interim manager role, retired clerk Cozzi still finds an organization chart with a clerk as interim manager to be appropriate "depending on the time spent in the clerk position and the level of confidence in the person's abilities and integrity" (J. Cozzi, personal communication, April 1, 2021). She said clerks can be "great interim managers" because "in their role they wear many hats (managerial, historical, political, professional, leadership) and are already an integral part of the executive team."

Internal/Local Applicant Hesitancy

A commonality among a few internal applicants interviewed for this paper is that they expressed hesitation in applying for the promotion. Rorie Watt, manager for the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ), did not apply during the first round of hiring at the municipality in 2015. CBJ received about 30 applications but chose to extend the recruitment timeline. Watt, 56, said "many people" encouraged him to apply, but he "was not ready" (R. Watt, personal communication, March 24, 2021). His feelings changed after the death of CBJ's newly elected mayor. "Partly out of duty and partly out of response to the ensuing assembly chaos, I put my name forward when they re-advertised in December of 2015," he said.

Watt's words are like what Haines clerk Fullerton stated publicly regarding "a sense of duty to the staff she currently oversees in her interim position" (Godinez, 2021a). Also notable is that Skagway manager Ryan waited multiple application rounds before applying for that municipality's opening. One factor for elected officials to consider in hiring is that the internal candidate may appear less enthusiastic about the position than an external candidate due to greater familiarity with the stresses of the job, especially when an applicant shows interest from out of state. Zoukee, for example, made a 10-year commitment to the position in his Haines interview and then turned the job down (Godinez, 2021b).

Despite a sample size of two, Watt's promotion brings up questions when connected to Anna Henderson, mentioned earlier in this paper from the Municipality of Anchorage. Watt and Henderson were internally promoted at two of the most prominent municipalities in the state with bachelor's degrees as their highest level of education; Watt, like Soldotna manager Queen, has an engineering degree from Cornell University. Are larger municipalities more favorable to internal promotion at top positions? Are they more likely to weigh practical experience over formal educational achievements? Watt's lack of graduate degree may have seemed irrelevant given the perception of a difficult major from an Ivy League university and his status as a licensed civil engineer. He also had worked at the municipality since 1993 and ran the engineering and public works departments. The stereotype of small-town cronyism propelling unworthy internal candidates to the top is not apparent in this paper, but the topic warrants further study to evaluate a divide in rural vs. urban attitudes.

When Ryan started as manager in Skagway, he joined two experienced staff members there who have served as interim manager – clerk Emily Deach and treasurer Heather Rodig.

Deach has been clerk at the municipality since 2010 and filled the interim role on multiple occasions. A report in *The Skagway News* (Giordano, 2014) described the Skagway Borough Assembly trimming the manager candidate list to five applicants in one hiring cycle:

Mayor Mark Schaefer said he had hoped to see current clerk and interim manager Emily Deach on the list, but she decided not to apply.

“I have been working on her for months, but no, (she will not apply), unfortunately,” he said.

Even if a clerk has no interest in applying for the permanent manager job, a public endorsement of managerial skills can change attitudes. As examined previously, hesitation to apply is not unusual. The 2014 AAMC Athenian Dialogue on *Lean In* addressed women’s hesitancy in applying for promotions. *Lean In* author Sandberg wrote, “An internal report at Hewlett-Packard revealed that women only apply for open jobs if they think they meet 100 percent of the criteria listed. Men apply if they think they meet 60 percent of the requirements” (Sandberg, 2013, p. 62).

Athenian Dialogues

Details about the Athenian Leadership Society are posted on the IIMC website, which describes the six-hour dialogues as conversations “beyond the usual knowledge recall and application process familiar to all municipal clerks in training seminars. They are unique because they explore leadership principles and practice, drawing on the insights contained in a book that all participants have read” (International Institute of Municipal Clerks, 2020). IIMC approves a list of books and facilitators, who are either IIMC members or professionals with knowledge of the clerk role. Each category mandates participation in a mentoring program plus

facilitator training, among other requirements. Approved IIMC members must have the MMC designation.

Facilitators serve IIMC's 10 regions, with the greatest number from Region IX, representing Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington. However, 18 of those 19 Region IX facilitators are from California and one is from Oregon (International Institute of Municipal Clerks, n.d.). The region list shows six facilitators at the MMC level. A facilitator from the "professionals" category who led a *Lean In* discussion is Dr. Cynthia Ganote, now Assistant Dean for Diversity and Community Engagement at the University of Louisville. The lack of facilitators from certain states raises concern about whether the standards for facilitation are too high. AAMC board members should be facilitating dialogues to make membership more comfortable tackling topics like gender and hiring practices.

A Region IX facilitator referred me to Ellen Freeman-Wakefield, Director of Professional Programs for the University of Nebraska at Omaha's School of Public Administration, where Freeman-Wakefield earned an MPA degree. Freeman-Wakefield, also the director for the Nebraska Clerks Institute and Academy, has facilitated Athenian Dialogues on books such as *Lean In* (see Figure 5) and *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*. "However, no matter the dialogue, I constantly challenge myself and the attendees to think about the alternatives and how situations are perceived differently depending on gender identification, ethnicity or race," she said (E. Freeman-Wakefield, personal communication, May 6, 2021). Freeman-Wakefield said she has "pushed the envelope" in her career "to bring both men and women into positions

considered non-traditional,” including hiring the first male childcare provider in the state of Nebraska in the 1980s when she was director for an early childhood center.

Figure 5: Ellen Freeman-Wakefield *Lean In* Athenian Dialogue Flyer

The flyer features a blue background. On the left is a portrait of Sheryl Sandberg with the book cover for 'Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead' below it. The cover shows her name and the title. To the right of the portrait, the event title 'Athenian Dialogue' is in bold black font, followed by the date 'Friday, June 10, 2016' and time '8:30 am—3:30pm'. Below that is the location 'City of Minnetonka/Minnehaha Room (lower level)' and address '14600 Minnetonka Blvd., Minnetonka, MN 55345'. The book title 'Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead' is in bold italicized black font. A quote box on the right says: 'Written with both humor and wisdom, Sandberg's book is an inspiring call to action and a blueprint for individual growth.' A large white box with a black border contains a summary of the book's content.

Athenian Dialogue
Friday, June 10, 2016
8:30 am—3:30pm
City of Minnetonka/Minnehaha Room (lower level)
14600 Minnetonka Blvd., Minnetonka, MN 55345
Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead

Written with both humor and wisdom, Sandberg's book is an inspiring call to action and a blueprint for individual growth.

Thirty years after women became 50 percent of the college graduates in the United States, men still hold the vast majority of leadership positions in government and industry. This means that women's voices are still not heard equally in the decisions that most affect our lives. In *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg examines why women's progress in achieving leadership roles has stalled, explains the root causes, and offers compelling, commonsense solutions that can empower women to achieve their full potential.

Sandberg is the chief operating officer of Facebook and is ranked on Fortune's list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business and as one of Time's 100 Most Influential People in the World. In 2010, she gave an electrifying TEDTalk in which she described how women unintentionally hold themselves back in their careers. Her talk, which became a phenomenon and has been viewed more than two million times, encouraged women to "sit at the table," seek challenges, take risks, and pursue their goals with gusto.

In *Lean In*, Sandberg digs deeper into these issues, combining personal anecdotes, hard data, and compelling research to cut through the layers of ambiguity and bias surrounding the lives and choices of working women. She recounts her own decisions, mistakes, and daily struggles to make the right choices for herself, her career, and her family. She provides practical advice on negotiation techniques, mentorship, and building a satisfying career, urging women to set boundaries and to abandon the myth of "having it all."

Source: Municipal Clerks and Finance Officers Association of Minnesota (2016)

Freeman-Wakefield said to achieve greater gender balance in the municipal clerk profession, “we need to dispel the myth that the position is ‘women’s work.’” This effort includes demonstrating a viable career trajectory for clerks, she said. A female former Alaska clerk who commented anonymously for this paper also emphasized career growth to diversify the profession, saying clerk should be marketed “as a steppingstone to governmental leadership” (Anonymous Clerk 2, personal communication, April 6, 2021). Freeman-Wakefield elaborated further on the “women’s work” concept:

Throughout history, clerks have responded to the public request for records, helped the council president set up the council meetings, prepared the agendas, ordinances, and

resolutions. Municipal clerks are the collaborators between government staff in working toward the municipalities' goals, objectives, policies, and priorities. These tasks are gender-neutral in reality, and almost anyone can perform them. The perception of it being "women's work" is still pervasive in society today, thereby derailing men from pursuing a role as a municipal clerk.

Conclusion

To improve the gender balance and fair treatment of the Alaska municipal clerk profession, employee development must be encouraged in small municipalities. Internal candidates should be given preference for interim openings, with these openings viewed as sincere professional development opportunities to lead to permanent promotions. When a clerk or any internal staff member serves as interim manager, additional protections should be in place. These include setting the interim pay rate at an amount unrelated to the employee's previous position; increasing pay throughout the term (example: every 90 days); and increasing pay each time the same employee must fill in for a significant length of time. Elected officials also should implement policies supporting workplace flexibility at all levels of the organization. When making hiring decisions, officials should carefully weigh the value of internal candidate work experience and training compared to formal education. Lastly, AAMC should make a concerted effort to diversify the profession, starting by tracking gender data in membership and having dialogues, whether Athenian or not. As facilitator Freeman-Wakefield said in her response for this paper, "Only with emotionally courageous conversations and education can people bring about the change they want to see and be."

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