

CREATIVE RESOLUTIONS IN-ACTION

EPISODE #1

Susan Thompson

FORMER MAYOR
CITY OF WINNIPEG



Episode Show Notes: creativeresolutions.ca/1

Colleen Sklar: Welcome to the first episode of Made in Manitoba. I'm Colleen Sklar, the executive director of the Manitoba Metro Region. As you might know, for the past number of years, I've been passionate about my work that focused on working with governments, trade groups, NGOs and service organizations across Manitoba. I have tried to move them to be more committed, more collaborative, more innovative and ultimately more actionable. One thing I insist on is not only having ideas and vision, but being able to find a tangible path



forward to execute and get things done. Vision is fine, but it is meaningless if it doesn't translate to action.

I started my blog/website creativeresolutiona.ca to support this work. I found out that there wasn't an accessible place to talk about all the things going on in Manitoba with smart, accomplished, driven people that I have come in contact with over the past 10 years. Why should I have all the fun? So this podcast will introduce you to cross section these people as we dive into the real world of Manitoba and with a mixture of smart conversation, expert advice, behind the scenes stories, and straight talk from leaders in government, business, industry, academia and civil society. What you hear is their diverse voices and ideas coming together to help finding common ground that we can stand on. The last ten years have been momentous, and I hope you will join us for the next chapter.

New episodes are released every other Monday for now, so don't forget to subscribe to Made in Manitoba on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts from - it's what will allow us to keep making this content. Don't worry I'll remind you at the end of this show.

Now let's roll up our sleeves and get started!

Today I have the pleasure of sitting down with Susan Thompson. Susan was the 40th Mayor of the City of Winnipeg and the first woman to serve as mayor in this city. Susan also created the Mayors and Reeves of the Capital Region in 1998, which is now known as the Winnipeg

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Metropolitan Region. Susan, thank you for speaking with me today. Now, in 1998 you were able to get all the Mayors and Reeves together, in one room for the first time - now that sure was a monumental task!

Mayor Susan Thompson: Indeed it was and thank you very much for for asking me to be part of this. It's very appreciated. When I became Mayor and in 1992, it became very obvious to me that all of Manitoba, Winnipeg, the Capital Region as it was called then, the entire province, all had to work together to the best capacity that we could, because in 1992 we had a net loss of people out of our province in our cities.

We we did not have businesses coming to Manitoba- We were not a have-not-province - when people have to choose did they want to go to Ontario. or Alberta, or British Columbia. they were not including Manitoba in that mix. So what did they care if there was this stupid bickering going on between Winnipeg and the Capital Region and other municipalities? Total Dysfunction. So I became Mayor in 1992 and was invited to the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, and it was one of the most unpleasant experiences. I was the new mayor, I didn't know history in terms of that relationship, and it was rude, unpleasant, confrontational, dysfunctional - I don't think I have to use any more words.

And it was all about my backyard and your backyard and everybody was a bad guy, and I was absolutely horrified. I was aghast to speak, and when I was driving back into Winnipeg I thought, oh I don't ever want to go back to them again! It's just awful. And, but of course as in

all things, the more you think about it, you go what has happened here? And I will go back to my original point - we could not afford to behave in such a manner. And so I spent the next few years going out to the municipalities talking to our administrator - what over a 30-40 year period had caused this dysfunction? Because I was all about the future. I was all about providing for our children and our families to have a future in this wonderful province, and in order to do that we sure as heck all better pull together, we all better figure out our priorities, how are we going to do it, and how are we going to show the rest of Canada that we are the best place to be.

Colleen: That that's just amazing story, and I can imagine the challenges at the time to bring all those players together. And you know I look back, and I read the documents, and I look at all the hard work that went on it, and it was incredibly visionary work. Do you think that the problems that you identified back then - about you not being able to afford it, about you know people leaving, about not being jobs for our children in the future - have those changed much in your opinion?

Mayor Thompson: Let me know if I may give you a couple of perspectives here. The backyard fights have not changed. Grow up. Get your thinking past you. It's not about you. It's about the future, so instead of this parochial thinking, and competition, and blaming, get past it. And get to what are the processes, the plans, the visions, that we can all work to get- i mean, honest to God, if you only come up with three, you're going to come up with something to move forward with.



But now we have a bigger problem, because we have a world in extreme weather conditions. And, you know it, in Manitoba by I think we're all very proud of how we can manage blizzards and floods - Thank God it's not hurricanes and all of this - However! We are seeing extremes. And one of the most important things we have to realize as a city, a region, and province, is what do we own.

Well you talked about us being the breadbasket. Well, I would say do you no, were the food basket. And what I mean by that is not only are we agricultural, but ranching, and all the other food products that we provide to the world - I am absolutely adamant about this - to the world! And as all these extremes in temperature and climate are occurring to us, our most urgent is for us to come together as communities and - how are, how are we going to deal with a drought in the Interlake, or the flooding in the Interlake? That's an important area to us, so who in the Capital Region can be the agricultural research hub? You know? Is that East St. Paul, West St. Paul? I don't know! But figure it out for crying out loud! Because we, we can't wait to to figure out our priorities anymore!

We, we, we own certain things, and we own being the food basket and then everybody in this Metropolitan Region has to figure out at a minimum: What are our top three areas of expertise? Where can we locate them? How do we service them? And then how do we build on this so we have a future?

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Colleen: Those are really powerful words Susan, because we all know that the extreme weather events are going to cost our communities a lot of money, and, and cost the world a lot of money and we have to get ready. And we also know that building resilience isn't done one community at a time it's done through a coalition and a collaborative approach. I guess it's, Susan one thing I'd really like to talk with you about is, recently there's been a lot of attention at the provincial government and at the municipal government around developing a regional land use servicing and infrastructure plan to lead us forward - like a future, a visionary plan. What do you think about that?

Mayor Thompson: Well first of all it is essential. I mean again we're a small little pea in a great big pod so just visualize that. You know, the pod isn't very important unless all the peas are terrific, right? So. You have to get your your plan, your processes, land use, all of that - I mean come on! That's very straightforward! The issue that's not straightforward is, for what?

And that has to be a very collaborative initiative amongst the province, and the region, and I I keep the City of Winnipeg an entity because I feel that's the appropriate way, but coming together. I remember when when I try to to push a vision I said you know 80% of Canadians live in cities. Well I don't care what kind of a city you are if you do not have water that people can drink, and some way to have electricity, and heat. And so you have to breathe the air, you have to drink the water, and you have to be able to survive the winters. And we have all of that!



We're blessed with clean air. we are blessed with our precious water supply, but we're really not giving it its due rewards.

And we have hydro. It is our greatest asset and we just have to protect it. So, so when you talk about what are the three things: we absolutely have to protect, those, those are the areas. And then you have to come up with what are our natural given economic driving areas and build upon them, and have that discussion beyond - When I first became Mayor, the sister city of Senegal, Japan came to visit us and he came into my office and it was a wonderful discussion.

But in that discussion, he said to me, what is your 25-year plan? Well I just about dropped dead!

I couldn't even get through each day! I mean, you know I had the media attacking me, I have my Council after me, I just didn't even know if I was ever going to walk out the office alive! And so when he said to me, "what is your 25 year plan?" I was stunned! I had produced a 6 year plan for being Mayor - but a 25 year plan?! And I said, "well I don't know." I said 25 years?

He said: "Well yes, what you're doing today has already been determined for you. And I just looked at him - well what are you talking about? He said "well all the policies and procedures were determined for you by your previous council and then your current council - so what you're doing today has already been determined! He said what you have to do is what's tomorrow - and tomorrow is 25 years from now

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because you have to look out to see whatever you're planning what is it going to look like in 25 years - cuz a good plan and I will repeat this, A good plan takes 25 years to come to fruition. So that's what people need to - Go to the end picture. What is it going to look like 25 years from now? And then start putting in place what you have to put in place to make sure you have that future.

Colleen: So this really is a call to leadership.

Mayor Thompson: Oh Absolutely. If you, you know, whether it be the Premier or the Mayors or the Reeves - If you are not prepared to stand up and be counted on then you're in the wrong place at the wrong time because now, time has run out now you must stand up and you must be counted on

Colleen: So are we on the right track - pushing for a regional vision and regional plan? Do you think we're on the right track?

Mayor Thompson: Oh, long overdue.

Colleen: Well just one kind of end question we've been asking all of our guests - those that are gracious enough to to come in and speak with us. One question: if you could speak to anybody, about anything, who would that person be, and what would you say?

Mayor Thompson: Well you know it was a huge question - Because of course you have to process: oh my goodness me, you know - don't kid



yourself - right about now I'd love to talk to Queen Elizabeth about what she thinks about Boris Johnson! And you know - I mean she has gone through 15 Prime Minister's starting with Churchill! Well, I want to know what she thought about Churchill!

And so you know, I mean, wow! It was a great question! But then I had to go through what would mean something to the people who might listen to this audio. And I have been to the Nelson Mandela exhibit at the Human Rights Museum - our incredible Human Rights Museum. And I listened to his various videos in that exhibition. So I am going to read to you what I'd like to leave you with today, because an actual fact, I would have loved to have met Nelson Mandela.

So to say the least, when I was listening to this one particular video of his, it was profound. And it was a profound experience. One of his quotes, and this is coming from a man who was imprisoned for 27 years. 27 years in a 6 by 6 cell. 27 years of torture. 27 years of isolation. 27 years of being dehumanized. Simply unbelievable to think of what this man went through - yet here is one of the things he said. He said to all of us - to all of us - "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and achieve."

Surely with all of our blessings and advantages as Canadians, we can all come together to fight for our wonderful country of Canada, our wonderful province of Manitoba and our great cities and municipalities. We absolutely must cherish and protect us.

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Colleen: Susan thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today we really enjoyed getting to know you, and really hearing your point of view.

Mayor Thompson: My pleasure thank you.

Colleen: And thank you all for joining us today on the first episode of Creative Resolutions In Action. Please be sure to rate, comment, and subscribe on iTunes or SoundCloud and join us next time when we'll sit down with Lannie McInnes from the Manitoba Home Builders, and ask him what he thinks is the way to work together to secure our future in Manitoba. Creative Resolutions In Action: Manitobans Building Strong Communities.

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