As incoming President of the Board of WICI - a small organisation with a very big network and even bigger ambitions - I am delighted to pay tribute to two long standing Board Members who have stepped down this year. They are Founding President Caroline Andrew, and Board Secretary Fran Klodawsky, who led the organisation for many years.

The many achievements of WICI reflect the extraordinary vision and commitment of Caroline, a recipient of the Order of Canada in 2014 and noted as one of Canada’s most powerful women in 2011, who provided leadership of a rare quality, with her renowned knowledge base and steadfast feminist philosophy. Fran, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University, brought depth and breadth to the principles of WICI, offering expert perspectives on the linkages between spatial planning, housing and women’s safety and inclusion. At a time when many still struggle to make these connections and persist in seeing the systemic nature of the challenges for women in cities in a linear and non-progressive way, this grounding has offered WICI an influential position in research and practice, using innovative, integrative ways to change expectations, perceptions and opportunities for women to contribute to, and participate, in cities that work for them. We have also been delighted to welcome our new Board members who bring a wealth of experience and insight.

WICI has, as you will see from this report, delivered significant and valuable work in our field over the year, maintaining a presence and voice that is highly valued in the sector, and supported by partners for whom we have great respect. We are encouraged by the response of both funders and partners, and will continue to play an important role in advocating for and demonstrating, innovative solutions that will make cities more inclusive, and women safer, and with more influential and varied roles. As can be seen from this report, WICI’s voice has again been heard around the world, taking with us lessons on gender inclusion, mobility and access for women, public spaces, the notion of a feminist city, and of course safety. Using new communications tools, WICI has become more accessible and our openness to both learning and partnership have been strengthened. WICI has continued to attract and be supported by interns and volunteers of outstanding quality. Their contribution to our projects and outputs, under the guidance of Kathryn Travers, WICI’s exceptional Executive Director, has been exceptional, and we are very grateful to them.

Along with many other non-government organisations doing essential work, funding and sustainability is a constant challenge for WICI. Work in this sector rarely delivers quick wins and it is our challenge to influence investment into longer term, more integrative and systemic approaches to change.

WICI thanks the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC) for their generosity and support over the year. We have a long and strong relationship them. Finally, thank you to the Board and to all our partners. We look forward to the next steps in our journey together.

Barbara Holtmann
President of the Board
Who We Are

Women in Cities International (WICI) was founded in 2002 as a not-for-profit network focusing on gender equality, safety and the participation of women in urban planning and development. Based in Montreal, WICI grew out of work undertaken by Canadian feminists in the 1990s to improve women’s safety in urban settings and empower women to participate in local governance and create change within city governments. Since that time WICI has grown considerably and expanded its work at the international level with the support of various partner organizations. It has embraced a broader concept of safety beyond safety in public space to focus on factors of exclusion and discrimination that prevent women and girls from accessing and moving around their city safely. WICI works to generate and exchange knowledge on women and girls’ experiences in urban environments, in partnership with various key actors at the local, national and international levels. It supports the participation of women and girls in all processes of urban development and governance and believes that if a city is safer for women and girls, it is safer for everyone.

The seven principles of WICI are:

1. Equitable Urban Development
2. Inclusion and Meaningful Participation
3. Security and Safety for Substantive Citizenship
4. Accountability and Integrity
5. Reflexivity and Respect
6. Sharing Knowledge
7. Sustainability
WICI in Action
Women in Cities International (WICI) attended the 9th World Urban Forum in February 2018, organizing, leading, and participating in many sessions about building cities that are safe and inclusive for women and girls. This edition of the week-long, bi-annual conference was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on the theme: Cities 2030 – Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban Agenda.

In collaboration with UN Habitat, Women’s Major Group, the Women’s Partner Constituency Group, the Huairou Commission and others, WICI organized the Women’s Assembly. This day-long event was attended by over 600 people. It presented and discussed WUF 9’s key themes from a gender inclusive perspective, making central the perspectives of women from across the globe on how to improve cities for all women and girls. There was a focus on grassroots women’s roles, and the Huairou Commission brought together a group of over 30 grassroots women as speakers and participants in the Assembly.

Throughout the Forum, WICI Executive Director Kathryn Travers also facilitated multiple sessions, including on “Metropolitan Policies to Implement the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda: Safe Cities for Women and Girls”; “Making Cities Safer for Girls: Curriculum-based workshop to change knowledge, attitudes, practices and skills of urban actors;” and “Using Apps to Address Gender Based Violence.”

We look forward to participating in WUF 10 in Abu Dhabi in 2020!
Beginning in 2017, and building on our past work, WiCI began a project to explore issues and needs concerning women’s mobility, safety and public transportation in the Montreal region of Quebec, Canada. This work led to a partnership with the Société de Transport de Laval, the Réseau de Transport Métropolitain (EXO) and the Ville de Laval, to develop and undertake women’s safety walks around three metro stations in Laval. The project enabled community members to explore and share their feelings and perceptions of safety in these high traffic transport areas. The aim is to develop a better understanding of how to make these public spaces safer and more accessible for everyone. As part of this work, WiCI developed a methodological handbook focused on women’s safety audits in the areas surrounding public transit stations. The goal of the handbook was to share inspiring practices in developing and leading women’s safety walks around public transit stations, and help structure the methodology for the project in Laval. The guide includes an audit checklist for women’s safety audits, based on seven criteria for an inclusive city. It is structured for the areas around public transit stations, but can be adapted for use in different city environments. To ground the project in the Laval context, WiCI conducted surveys and observations at the three metro stations. In the current phase of the project, WiCI is continuing to engage with participants and stakeholders to conduct the women’s safety audits at the metro stations in Laval in the fall 2018.
From October 2017, WICI has been involved in organizing a series of events on the feminist city. The purpose is to strengthen our presence and partnerships in the city, and throw a spotlight on different initiatives developed by various organizations to improve the situation of women in the city. The forums were made possible with the support of a number of partners including le Conseil des Montréalaises, le Regroupement des étudiants à la maîtrise en urbanisme, le Centre d’éducation et d’action pour des femmes, Femmes du monde à Côte des Neiges and others.

The Forums took the form of discussions and exchanges between the various partners. Each organization presented their work on specific topics and in the context of Montreal. This was followed by a series of roundtable discussions making recommendations and defining priorities for action, and the completion of a final document of recommendations.

Two forums with local partners have been completed so far, one on issues facing women from different racial backgrounds and cultures, and the other on the safety of women and girls in Montreal. Future Forums will focus on new approaches to women’s safety in public space, and the role of urban feminist art.

Forum on the Feminist City
Montreal, Quebec
In the summer of 2018, WICI was invited by the Société de transport de Montréal (STM) to participate in a consultation workshop on their strategy for the expansion and updating of the STM bus network. Participants were given the opportunity to learn more about the STM’s plans for the bus network, and share their perspectives on what an ideal bus network should look like, and make recommendations on improving the city bus network. Two representatives from WICI attended and raised the importance of safety and perceptions of safety around public transport, and the need to consider women’s needs and mobility patterns when developing bus networks and bus design. They also presented WICI’s ongoing women’s safety audit project in Laval. A second phase of this consultation inviting the general public to provide input on the strategy was planned for the fall of 2018.

In May 2018, WICI participated in a training day offered by the Québec association of urban planners and municipal urbanists on the theme Allier Aménagement Du Territoire Et Mobilité Quelle Approche Pour Favoriser L’action Publique?. It covered a number of central topics for WICI - mobilité, public transportation, public participation in planning and development decisions in transportation context etc. A particularly inspiring presentation was given by Sonia Lavadinho, director of the firm bfluid, who spoke about parks having second skins. This involves the notion that the areas surrounding parks and other public spaces are as important as the parks themselves, and must not be neglected in planning and design decisions. Citizens’ access to public spaces influence the ways they use and experience them.
2018 marked the second year of the WICI project Right to Campus at the University of McGill downtown campus in Montreal. Overall, our most significant accomplishment to date has been the creation of the Right to Campus Toolkit. Funded by McGill’s Sustainability Projects Fund, the Right to Campus Toolkit is a website comprised of original resources that work to foster equity, accessibility, inclusivity, and safety on McGill’s downtown campus. This includes WICI’s series of maps and its campus safety zine. Existing resources that address student safety and campus accessibility have also been centralized in order to aid students in navigating McGill with greater ease. Our plans for the future of the Right to Campus Toolkit includes its maintenance through continuously updating the materials, as well as its further development through continued research efforts by Right to Campus volunteers.

In the last two years Right to Campus has also held events and workshops centering on issues of safety, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility. Through collaboration with various McGill groups, including the Social Equity and Diversity Office, as well as the Union for Gender Empowerment, we have successfully hosted events with as many as 200 attendees. Our events to-date have included:

- An art show that showcased women artists and art exploring the way women navigate public space;
- a film screening and discussion panel concerning sexual violence;
- “storytelling cafes”, involving the creation of a space where students, administrators, and academic staff can come together to discuss issues relating to social and physical safety at McGill;
- a series of safety audits with student volunteers of McGill’s downtown campus;
- a launch event for the Toolkit.

In the coming years, we hope to continue to build Right to Campus by fostering more collaborations with clubs and services at McGill, and working to host events that cater to the needs of this unique campus environment.
In spring 2017, WICI’s communications volunteers created “small talks & city blocks”, an original WICI podcast production. The podcast promotes WICI’s values by hosting conversations about gendered experiences of city life, and the work being done to promote inclusive and equitable cities and communities for all. We released our first three episodes to coincide with International Anti-Street Harassment Week which takes place in April each year.

The first episode was a conversation with Holly Kearl, the founder of the organization Stop Street Harassment and of Anti Street Harassment week. She spoke about how we can tackle street harassment globally, as well as how to respond when it happens to you in your daily life.

The second episode featured WICI’s Executive Director Kathryn Travers in conversation with Ayesha Vemuri, a researcher on rape culture and the social media practices of feminist activists in India. They talked about the parallels between street harassment and resistance in different global contexts, and about the complexities of social media and technologies as tools in movements to end street harassment.

The final conversation in this series was with Montreal-based artists Caroline Alexander and Cynthia Hammond at their exhibit “Safety Strategies: Space, Gender and the City”, a display of memory maps and written reflections made by women, and centered on their experiences of the city and strategies they employ to feel safe within it. This exhibition contributes to the larger feminist project of making gendered urban experiences visible, shared, discussed and understood, which is fundamental to the design of more equitable, inclusive and safe cities.

The conversations we had in these episodes were enlightening, inspiring, and fun. We learned so much from these amazing women who work everyday to challenge the harassment that limits women’s access to public space and equality. To hear our conversations, subscribe to our podcast on iTunes or check it out on Soundcloud.
In partnership with Metropolis, the World Association of the Major Metropolises, WICI co-authored the report “Safety and Public Space: Mapping Metropolitan Gender Policies.” The report maps policies in metropolises across the world that aim to promote women’s safety in public spaces. Data was collected from November 2017 to May 2018 through questionnaires, desk research, face-to-face exchanges, and personal email correspondence. This project sheds light on the involvement of member cities of Metropolis that are working to ensure that women and girls have the right to the city through metropolitan governance. It maps policies, strategies and instruments that foster safer and more accessible streets, squares, parks, neighborhoods etc. for women and girls. You can access the report on Metropolis’ and Women in Cities International’s websites and social media pages.
As an organization we are committed to reflecting on our actions, learning from our practices and continually evaluating our capacity to achieve our objectives fully in line with our values and principles. An integral part of our reflexivity is to monitor our own practice in treating others with respect, and to be continually working in a way that embodies our mission for gender equality and the participation of women in urban development.

Throughout the past year, the WICI team and Board prioritized a reflection on the organization’s actions, practices, progress, and structure, both internally and externally. Moving forward into the new year, we are committed to continuing this reflexive process specifically with the goal of putting in place a more sustainable structure, including for its volunteers, in order to ensure more stability within the organization.

With the same goal of sustainability, we will continue to find collaborative and creative ways to build our current network and work with local women’s groups in Montreal and internationally, through events, workshops and consultations. We will do so by building on our extensive list of partners including, but not limited to UN Habitat and the Safer Cities Programme and the Global Network on Safer Cities and the UN Habitat Gender and Urbanisation UNI Hub; UN Women and their Global Flagship Programme Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls; OECD, the Huairou Commission, Plan International, as well as local and Canadian organizations.

With this stability, we expect to be able to carry out our mandate in accordance with our seven principal values of Gender Equality and Equitable Urban Development, Inclusion and Meaningful Participation in Decision-making, Safety for Sustainable Cities and Communities, Accountability and Integrity, Reflexivity and Respect, Sharing Knowledge, and Sustainability.

Moving Forward