

Ending the paper chase

Brandon City Council goes paperless

Submitted by the City of Brandon

The City of Brandon has long been a pioneer in Manitoba's recycling movement. Home to a state-of-the-art material recycling facility, Brandon residents enjoy curbside collection of household waste, recyclables, and yard waste. Brandon City Council is not only a firm believer in recycling, but in reducing waste as much as possible. This year they decided to tackle one area where a great deal of paper was being used – council meetings. Not satisfied to simply reduce the amount of paper that was being used each meeting, the council took the bold step to go where few councils have gone before – completely paperless.

Out with the old, in with the new

The City of Brandon's paperless concept actually started a number of years ago with internal and external communication being carried out as much as possible through the use of e-mails. This, of course, has drastically reduced Brandon's annual paper, postage and staff costs, and led the council to ask themselves some questions: Why produce all that paper when we don't really have to? Why not use the technology when it is right there at our fingertips?

Council decided it was time to leave the old cumbersome paper generating methods behind when it came to preparing for Coun-

cil meetings. No more multi page agenda packages being painstakingly put together and delivered throughout the City to each member of Council, with copies made for City Administration and the media for the Council meetings. Council specifically wanted access to the detailed information to be electronic and to use no more paper. As well, Council determined that it was important for the public to have the same ease of access so that Council could be seen as transparent and accountable. It was felt that the public needed to know not only what Council decided, but also the background for such decisions. Now, at the Council meetings, the agenda and all supporting documentation are viewed and notes are created electronically through the use of laptop computers.

“This fits in well with our desire to set a proper environmental example to our residents...”
Mayor Dave Burgess,
City of Brandon

Because not all Council members had personal computers at home, it was agreed to purchase a laptop for each of the 11 members at a cost of \$1,000 each, a considerable savings due to the bulk purchase. (This investment will be easily recouped in just one year of practice). Council members could then use their laptops when at home or away and, most importantly, bring the laptops to the Council meeting to access the meeting agenda. This allows them to make notes before, during and following the meeting. In addition, the laptop allows the continuous electronic flow of information from City Administration to City Council on a daily basis. Previously, any information had to be copied and packages were delivered to members only once a week.

The agenda and all supporting documentation is not only available to the Council members electronically. The public and the media have full electronic access from the City's website as well.

Brandon Mayor **Dave Burgess** says the move to a paperless agenda has been easier than expected and allows for more efficient and effective information flow to all of Council with their laptop computers. He notes, “this also fits in well with our desire to set a proper environmental example to our residents wherever possible”.



What are the savings?

With the introduction of the paperless agenda, the annual savings in paper and delivery costs to the City of Brandon will amount to \$2,029.96.

The staff hours reduced will result in an estimated savings of \$9,312.00.

This adds up to a total annual saving in operating costs in the first year of over \$11,000.

The savings to the environment? Priceless.

Why stop there?

While the City of Brandon could have patted itself on the back for its environmental initiative at the council table, the paperless mindset did not end there. City Administration was paralleling City Council's departure from the paper war. Why print and distribute reports manually when they're prepared electronically? These reports are now signed electronically, emailed to various addressees and even submitted for approval electronically. Not only is the demand for paper diminished considerably, but valuable staff time in physically preparing and transmitting these reports is being saved. As well, the entire operational process is much more quick and efficient.

But why stop even there? The paperless concept was expanded further to assist City Administration in its supportive function to City Council. A seamless electronic flow of communication from the public and City Administration to City Council and then back has been developed through a collaborative effort involving the City's Infor-

mation Technology and the City Clerk's Departments. Once a report has been created and approved for submission to City Council or a submission is received from the public and scanned, it is electronically integrated into the Council meeting agenda document for consideration and debate by Council. Electronically produced and colour-coded maps, drawings and charts are now accessible for viewing by all. Once dealt with by Council, the matter electronically flows into the minutes of the meeting and the advisory process that disseminates Council's decision - most of which is also being done electronically.

What is the key to the City of Brandon's success in implementing a paperless agenda concept? "Keep it simple," advises **Conrad Arvisais**, City Clerk. By doing just that, the City of Brandon has been able to bring about increased efficiencies and ease of access for Council, City Administration and the public they serve. Best of all, their approach is environmentally friendly - and saves money. ♻️



Nelson River Construction Inc.

FOR ALL YOUR CONSTRUCTION NEEDS

Municipal, Residential,
Commercial and Industrial Works
Ashphalt & Concrete Paving
Sewer & Water

101 Dawson Road North
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2J 0S6
Telephone: (204) 949-8700
Fax: (204) 237-8337



www.nelsonriver.com