

# Anatomy of an Amalgamation

Submitted by the RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain

Editor's Note: On January 1, 2007, the Town of Killarney and the RM of Turtle Mountain amalgamated into the Municipality of Killarney-Turtle Mountain. While not the first neighbouring municipalities to merge in the province, the practice is not widespread. The Municipal Leader approached the 'new' municipality and asked if they would share their experiences with our readers. The intent is to introduce you to their journey to amalgamation in this installment, check in midway through the year to see how they are making out, and wrap up the series at the beginning of 2008 by telling you what they learned throughout the process.

We hope you enjoy the first installment of "Anatomy of an Amalgamation."

When asked if we would consider submitting a series of articles to *The Municipal Leader* on the amalgamation process for Killarney – Turtle Mountain, the first thing that came to mind was when we would find time with the process of change still ongoing.

However, we believe that the story of this initiative taken by our councils to improve the services for the community needs to be told, as an alternative to the status quo.

## In the beginning

The respective councils for the Town of Killarney and Rural Municipality of Turtle Mountain had, for a considerable time, sought ways of working together to achieve service delivery cost efficiencies, and to promote good and flexible governance. The strong relationship between the councils led

to the desire to openly explore fundamental restructuring opportunities.

Indeed, Killarney and Turtle Mountain were the first municipalities in Manitoba to conduct a feasibility study on amalgamation. The financial profiles of Killarney and Turtle Mountain were analyzed and financial modeling used to examine combined operations of the two municipalities. A series of focus groups were conducted to explore community members' perceptions on the relative merits of restructuring initiatives and key informants were asked to provide additional information and perspective.

Generally, residents believed that amalgamation could work to better equip Killarney and Turtle Mountain, as a combined entity, to ensure long-term viability, community development and growth in the

future. Increased operations efficiencies, economies of scale, economic development and a stronger voice were among potential advantages which residents perceived to be associated with amalgamation.

However, residents also recognize that in order to maximize the benefits of amalgamation, council would need to work to minimize the barriers. Ratepayers voiced concerns about amalgamation and identified several issues that councils needed to carefully examine. It was felt that a thorough exploration of all options might enable councils to present solutions that are beneficial and advantageous to residents of the entire area.

Some of the key issues addressed included: economic development, operational efficiencies, taxation and council representation.

Killarney Lake



### A brief overview of our submission to the Municipal Board

The new municipality is named the Municipality of Killarney - Turtle Mountain and has a status of a Rural Municipality. The Council is to be composed of a Head of Council (Mayor) and six Councillors. The Head of Council is to be elected-at-large. Councillors will be elected by wards – three from the rural ward and three from the urban ward.

Effective January 1, 2007, the employees of the former Town of Killarney and the RM of Turtle Mountain became employees of the Municipality of Killarney - Turtle Mountain and shall have the rights and privileges of all applicable federal and provincial government employment laws.

#### Application of By-laws and Resolutions of the Town of Killarney and RM of Turtle Mountain

Effective January 1, 2007, the by-laws and resolutions of the Town of Killarney and the RM of Turtle Mountain are continued as by-laws of the Municipality of Killarney - Turtle Mountain, and in the case of a conflict between the by-laws and resolutions the RM of Turtle Mountain by-laws or resolutions shall apply.

#### Capital and Infrastructure Assets

The capital and infrastructure assets of the Town of Killarney and the RM of Turtle Mountain will become the property of the Municipality of Killarney - Turtle Mountain on January 1, 2007.

#### Municipal Debenture Debts and Utility Debts

Existing RM of Turtle Mountain and Town of Killarney municipal debenture debts, utility debenture debts and borrowing authority shall remain with original properties that incurred the debt.

#### Financial Plan

The Financial Plan will be structured to have an At Large, Rural and Urban Mill Rate. All ratepayers will be responsible for the At Large mill rate and either the Rural or Urban mill rate depending on the location of their property. This will help ensure that the ratepayers are only paying for services their area receives.

#### Proposed Service Areas

To accommodate the proposed structuring of the Financial Plan we propose to have two service areas that correspond with the ward boundaries.

– Jim Dowsett, CAO, RM of Killarney-Turtle Mountain

Residents and councillors alike identified planning for the future of Killarney and Turtle Mountain as a major priority by. Citizens recognized the need to maintain current businesses, while working to generate and attract more growth. Youth in particular requested attention to job creation and employment opportunities that would allow them to remain in the area.

There was a general feeling that municipal amalgamation might offer assistance in securing future development. New business may be more willing to locate themselves in an area that has already resolved potential planning conflicts and has created a long range development plan.

Focus groups and key informants also felt that an amalgamated area could have a stronger voice. A single entity with a larger geographic area and greater population may have an increased influence in discussions with business, government and other communities.

Because Killarney and Turtle Mountain currently worked together on a number of joint servicing agreements, many potential operational efficiencies have already been identified. However, further efficiencies will be achieved by the economies of scale brought about by an amalgamation. Further

“After living together for almost 40 years, it was time to make it official!”



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The first meeting of the Municipality of Killarney-Turtle Mountain. Back row (L-R): Councillors Randy Hodge, Gerry Blixhavn, Dwight King, and Peter Heide. Front row: Councillor Gwen Tripp, Mayor Brian Moore, CAO Jim Dowsett, Councillor Lorne Whitelock

In addition to the new Council, we would like to mention the following members of prior Councils whose efforts and vision of the future for our community helped to get us where we are today: **Jody Archibald, Daryl Bacon, Ed Braun, Philip Down, George Friesen, Jack Garabed, Wayne Gutscher, Nancy Janzen, Alvin Jones, Wayne Nichol, Rick Pauls, Ron Opperman, Sandra Warnez, and Mark Witherspoon.**

sharing and coordinating of equipment, and tools could result in some saving, dependent upon the policy decisions of council in this area.

Establishing equitable representation from rural and urban areas and the process for electing councillors and the head of the council were also identified as key issues. Residents raised concerns about ensuring that with a single council, neither the urban nor the rural area had more influence in decision-making. People recognized that although rural and urban concerns were often similar and goals were shared, potential existed for differing views to be held.

Based on the views put forward at the focus groups, the most feasible scenario may be the development of a rural and an urban ward, each with the same number of council members elected by residents of that particular ward. In this scenario, the head of council could be elected 'at large' and determined by the residents of both wards. The Municipal Act has considerable flexibility in this area to accommodate such strategies.

## History of cooperation

The Town of Killarney and the RM of Turtle Mountain have always had a history of cooperation. In 1970, the decision was made to combine the two municipal offices and share the administrative staff. The cooperation of both councils is still evident in their attitude of what's good for the community is good for each municipality. As **Dale Banman** of the Killarney-Turtle Mountain Chamber of Commerce points out, "After living together for almost 40 years, it was time to make it official!"

Examples of the shared service are outlined below.

1. The Town of Killarney and the RM of Turtle Mountain public works staff work out of a recently renovated public works building sharing the costs of utilities and shop supplies. The Killarney Arena was owned by the Town of Killarney. The RM of Turtle Mountain assists in the operational costs. The future plans for a new recreation facility will be cost shared equally.

2. The Killarney Landfill Site operational costs are shared on an equal bases and the upgrade to the facility should provide a disposal site for the next 20 years.
3. The Joint Projects Committee of both Councils met monthly to deal with issues regarding the Killarney Area Planning District, Killarney Cemetery, Recycling Depot, Fire Department, Killarney And District Community Development Corporation and joint staffing.

## 'Status quo' not good enough

Municipalities are feeling the pressures of declining populations and assessment increases not keeping up with the expectation of services from ratepayers, although our municipalities have not followed the current trend for Western Manitoba. In fact, the population in the Town of Killarney actually *increased* in the 2001 census, and the RM of Turtle Mountain assessment increases have been above the provincial average. However, councils here have never felt that the status quo is good enough for our community, and if we are not looking for ways to improve how we deliver services, we are falling behind.

Councils felt that the amalgamation of the two corporations is a nature progression for the future of the two municipalities, and although we are not the first to amalgamate we are sure we will not be the last. As we proceed we are still finding items and issues that we did not contemplate. The amalgamation is a work in progress; the smooth transition from two corporations to one will be achieved with the hard work of Council and staff.

We look forward to sharing our ongoing experiences with the amalgamation in future issues of *The Leader*. Wish us luck! 🍀

## About Killarney...

Sitting on the shores of a beautiful Killarney Lake, the Town of Killarney is a thriving community with a population of just over 2500 people. Killarney is located at the junction of Highway 3 and 18 in the Westman Region of the province, one hour from Brandon, the region's largest city, and 300 km from the provincial capital, Winnipeg.

## About Turtle Mountain...

Just 20 km from the US border, 100 km from Brandon, and 240 km from Winnipeg, the RM of Turtle Mountain has a population of 1,179 residents. The RM of Riverside borders Turtle Mountain to the north. The Town of Killarney serves as the major business and service centre for both municipalities. Turtle Mountain was named because of its proximity to the beautiful Turtle Mountains Provincial Park to the west.