

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING: The New RM of Brokenhead

The Village of Garson and the RM of Brokenhead amalgamated on January 1, 2003, to form the new RM of Brokenhead. Located 44 kilometres east of Winnipeg, Brokenhead is predominantly an agriculture-based municipality. Its small urban communities, Garson and Tyndall, are home to many of the municipality's public and recreational facilities.

The Village of Garson was dealing with many pressures. The community, with its population of 350, was not growing. The municipality was having difficulty providing quality, affordable services to its citizens, while almost 40% of its budget was allocated to "general government services". Four of five council members had announced that they would not seek re-election in the October 2002 municipal general election, and the CAO (Garson's sole staff member) was retiring at the end of 2002. The Village also had a very serious issue on its hands when it was placed on a Boil Water Advisory but, due to its limited borrowing capacity, could not finance a new sewer and water system. Council felt that it was necessary to consider restructuring if the community was to survive.

It seemed natural for the Village to approach the RM of Brokenhead to determine its interest in a merger. Garson and Brokenhead already had a long history of co-operation, and had several municipal services sharing agreements (sewer and water services, landfill site and planning district) and shared community facilities (Tyndall Curling Club, Garson Skating Rink, Tyndall Village Community Centre and the Community Hall). Garson also contracted Brokenhead to provide public works services.

Brokenhead was interested in formalizing its partnership with Garson through a merger and saw many advantages. Mainly, Brokenhead was committed to its neighbour, and felt that Garson's survival was critical to the health of the region. It felt that it could combine the resources of the two municipalities to attract development to the community and find new uses for its existing facilities. As well, Brokenhead believed that a merger would ensure more control over development in agricultural areas.

Over the next couple of years, the partners developed their merger proposal and embarked on a public consultation process to present the proposal to the community.

The Village of Garson Council faced many pressures and recognized that in order for their community to thrive, it needed to restructure.

The RM of Brokenhead was committed to its neighbour and believed a merger would maintain the strength of the region as a whole.



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The two councils jointly hosted several public meetings to keep residents updated on discussions about the proposed merger and to provide the opportunity for residents to ask questions. Information was made available about the legal process, the existing level of co-operation between the two municipalities and the effect of a merger on mill rates. Because Garson was being proposed as a Local Urban District (LUD) to ensure urban residents received and financed urban services, information was also provided on LUDs and how they worked. The close proximity of the existing LUD of Tyndall to Garson triggered a proposal to combine Tyndall and Garson as a single LUD, to maintain local identity.

Throughout the discussions, the councils made sure that progress reports were provided to the local media, to ensure clear, accurate information was reported. By taking this step, the councils enhanced public understanding and built public support for the merger proposal.

The restructuring agreement was successfully concluded before the October 2002 municipal general election so that a new council for the merged municipality could be elected at the usual time. To facilitate a smooth transition to a single municipality, the terms of the council of the former RM and Village were extended to December 31, 2002 and the new council took office January 1, 2003, when the new municipality was officially established. During the post-election period (between late October and December 31, 2002) the newly elected council met to prepare for the commencement of their term.

The new RM of Brokenhead is functioning with ease and has experienced few, if any, transitional problems. The new LUD of Tyndall–Garson provides the mechanism for formal representation of the urban communities. The new RM has also secured borrowing approval for a new sewer and water system.

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Strong public support for the merger was made possible by the ready availability of clear, accurate information.

For more information on municipal restructuring, Successful Municipal Practices, and the Tools for Change program, see the Association of Manitoba Municipalities' website, at www.amm.mb.ca.