

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

BETTER MUNICIPAL PRACTICES: A Model for Transparent Council Decision-Making The R.M. of North Cypress and the Town of Carberry

Many municipal councils want to ensure that the public is informed of important decisions made during meetings. After all, open and accountable local government and citizen participation are key building blocks of a healthy democracy. But what if the media isn't attending council meetings? Or, what if the information being published by the media is inaccurate? How can municipal councils increase public interest in the decisions they make? Two councils have taken a proactive approach to be more open and accountable to their citizens, and have joined forces to help ensure important information is reaching ratepayers in their communities.

The R.M. of North Cypress and the Town of Carberry pay for a newspaper reporter to attend each and every meeting so that council happenings can be reported in both communities. Council relays municipal business to the reporter during the meeting, and the reporter then develops an interesting story. Although it can be argued that this may lead to biased news stories, the reporter writes the articles independently of council. There is a small cost involved – however both councils feel that the cost of paying for a reporter is far outweighed by the benefit of an informed public. By providing information directly to the newspaper, council can be confident that good, correct information is reaching the public.

This innovative approach represents a commitment by the two councils to improve public accountability and accessibility. It helps to keep the communities informed and up-to-date on the issues that affect them and has resulted in much more 'reader-friendly' stories than simply publishing council minutes. Importantly, public interest in council meetings has increased since the two municipalities have started this practice. The councils receive a fair bit of comment after the stories are published, as citizens have access to accurate council information on a regular basis and are able to debate the issues.

Taking steps to make sure municipal business is reported to the public is a great example of how two municipalities are enhancing their accountability to their residents and ratepayers.

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This inventive practice is making citizens feel like their council is working for them and in their best interests. It is helping to keep citizens interested in council decision-making and represents a great example of how two municipalities have taken proactive steps to be more open and accountable to ratepayers in their communities.

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