

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

WORKING REGIONALLY WITH NEW PARTNERS

Amalgamation

Municipality of Killarney-Turtle Mountain

For many years the Town of Killarney and the Rural Municipality (RM) of Turtle Mountain partnered to provide municipal services to their citizens. This partnering helped to achieve cost efficiencies and avoid service duplication. The success of these partnerships and their strong working relationship encouraged the two councils to consider the opportunities and benefits of amalgamating to form one municipality.

Discussions about amalgamation first took place several years ago, in 1997. At that time, the councils agreed that amalgamation would be beneficial as the two communities were already enjoying the benefits of increased operating efficiencies through service sharing. Since 1970, the municipalities had shared office space and administrative staff and more recently, a renovated public works building shared by the two public works departments. The recycling depot, fire department, cemetery, community development corporation and the utility system were also joint ventures.

A major challenge to amalgamation at that time, however, related to taxpayers' concerns about how services delivered to different parts of the municipality would be financed. It was evident that rural area taxpayers did not want to pay for services provided only to the urban area and vice versa. Regardless, council remained interested in exploring amalgamation, while also being mindful of the importance of addressing taxpayers' concerns.

Subsequently, in 2001 an amendment to *The Municipal Act* was passed that assisted council in addressing the financing concern. The amendment enabled councils to establish different rates of taxation for areas based on the services provided, on a transitional basis.

With this legislative change, the two councils were ready to once again talk about amalgamation. A feasibility study was undertaken that analyzed the financial situation of each of the municipalities. Financial modeling provided a clear picture of the financial impact of amalgamating.

The two municipalities had a long history of cooperation including shared offices and administrative staff, public works building and many shared services.

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A series of public meetings were held to explore community perception on amalgamation initiatives and the citizens were encouraged to provide their perspective on the proposal. Generally, the citizens recognized the need to maintain current businesses and community identity, while working to generate future growth. Youth in particular brought forward the need for increased employment opportunities that would enable them to remain in the community. Business owners thought that businesses would be more willing to locate in an area that worked together with a vision for the future, particularly in regards to land use planning and development. There was a general consensus that amalgamation would be beneficial in addressing these concerns.

Citizens also agreed that amalgamation would provide the area with a stronger voice. One entity with a larger geographic area and population would have an increased influence in discussions and negotiations with businesses, governments and other communities.

It was clear from the consultation process that council representation remained an important public issue. The citizens of Killarney and Turtle Mountain wanted equal representation on council for both the rural and the urban area to ensure both areas had the same amount of influence at the council table. Using the transitional provisions of *The Municipal Act* it was agreed that, for the first two election terms (2006–2010; 2010–2014) the council would be comprised of one urban ward for the “old” Town of Killarney, and one rural ward for the “old” RM of Turtle Mountain. Three councillors would be elected from each ward and the head of council elected “at large”.

Maintaining the ward structure for two election terms would provide the new municipality with adequate time to work through amalgamation implementation issues and consult with citizens on a new ward by-law to be in effect for the 2014 election.

After several years of careful consideration and deliberation, on January 1, 2007 the Town of Killarney and the RM of Turtle Mountain amalgamated to form the Municipality of Killarney–Turtle Mountain. The municipality used varying mill rates to ensure that the urban and the rural area pay for services they enjoy in their respective areas.

The hard work of council and staff and the creative use of transition measures made the amalgamation of the two communities a relatively smooth process. The valuable input and support from the citizens has enabled the two communities to move forward with a united voice. The council is confident that the solid commitment of the communities to work together will ensure a promising future for the Municipality of Killarney-Turtle Mountain.

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



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