

# Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



## *Tools for Change*

### **BETTER MUNICIPAL BUSINESS PRACTICE: Running Water for Municipal Customers The RM of Morris**

The RM of Morris expands across 400 square miles of fertile agricultural land in the Pembina Valley, approximately 50 kilometers southwest of Winnipeg. The RM is home to approximately 2,700 residents who live on farms or in one of nine settlement communities in the area. Until the last few years, only the homes in the two larger communities of Lowe Farm and Rosenort were serviced with piped treated water. Residents in the other parts of the municipality had to have their water supply hauled by truck and water tank and stored in a cistern on their property, a practice which was both costly and inconvenient.

*Council responded to ratepayer demands for a convenient and safe water supply.*

In 1997, in response to requests from the citizens, council took the first step in what would be a long-term project, and contracted the services of the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) engineers to prepare a cost estimate for the installation of a rural water line system. Council was aware of a cost-shared program, funded by PFRA and the Manitoba Water Services Board (MWSB), available to municipalities. Taking these grants into consideration, the engineers estimated a cost of \$8,000 per household for a rural waterline that could service the entire municipality. Public response to the proposed rural water line project was overwhelmingly positive and the residents of the RM were anxious for the project to proceed.

*Residents were anxious for the rural water line project to proceed at the estimated cost of \$8,000 per household.*

Between 1998 and 2003, using the technical and financial assistance available from the cost-shared program, as well as some additional infrastructure funding, the municipality provided piped water to one-half of the households that had initially signed up. During this first stage of the project the municipality hired private contractors to install the mainline and the service lines into the homes.

In 2004, with contractors' prices increasing and less cost-shared funding available, Council agreed that they should look into new, more cost efficient ways to install the water lines in order to meet their original commitment of \$8,000 per household. That year, the municipality purchased a used directional boring machine, hired two additional employees and installed the service lines to 109 more households with their own equipment and manpower. The municipality continued to use the services of a private contractor to install the mainline.

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Council was so pleased with their success in keeping costs down that the following year the municipality purchased a used trenching machine and installed the mainline as well as the service lines to 50 more households.

In 2006 the RM is installing 86 water service connections, completing the final phase of the rural water line project. The RM has sold the directional boring and trenching machine and the proceeds from this sale of this equipment have been put into a reserve fund for future equipment needs.

The Council took a pro-active, responsible approach to a servicing challenge and by the end of 2006 the RM of Morris will have completed 456 household connections. By purchasing their own equipment and utilizing their own workforce the RM was able to contain costs and honor their commitment to the residents and provide every household that wanted a rural waterline service with a connection at an equal cost. The residents are extremely pleased that they no longer have to haul water and although it has taken almost ten years to complete the project, all agree that it was well worth the wait.

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*For more information on better municipal business practices, Successful Municipal Practices, and the Tools for Change program, see the Association of Manitoba Municipalities' website, at [www.amm.mb.ca](http://www.amm.mb.ca).*