

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

BETTER MUNICIPAL BUSINESS PRACTICE: Shared Municipal Office Town of Grandview / RM of Grandview

The Town and the RM of Grandview are located along PTH#5 in the picturesque valley between Duck Mountain National Park and Riding Mountain National Park. Given the many challenges facing a small rural town and a farming community today, the two municipalities understand the importance of working together in order to secure a strong future.

Over the years the two councils have come to realize that service sharing makes sound economic sense. Many municipal services provided by one municipality benefits the citizens of the other, and by entering into service sharing agreements additional and improved services can be provided to the entire community. Over the last number of years the Town and RM have partnered together to provide many services including recreation, fire protection, ambulance, waste disposal, recycling, library, cemetery and emergency services and physician recruitment incentives.

The Town and the RM were presented with another partnership opportunity when the office building of the former Intermountain School Division was vacated in 2003. The Town was in need of more office space as they were quickly outgrowing their small one-room office. The RM was comfortable in their current location however they could see the advantage of sharing office space with the Town. Talks between the two councils began.

In making their decision, the two councils considered both the challenges and benefits of sharing office space. The challenges included citizens adjusting to the new office location, employee acceptance of the new arrangement, maintaining confidentiality between the two offices and increased customer traffic. The possibility that the two office buildings could remain vacant also posed a problem that had to be considered. The benefits included:

- Improved customer service. A “one-stop shop” for those who need to do business with both the Town and the RM or for those who are unsure which municipality they need to see.
- Improved communication between the two municipalities – staff and council members.

The Town has a population of 839 and the RM 736. The two municipalities enjoy many 50/50 service sharing agreements.

The two councils agreed that the benefits of sharing office space far outweighed the challenges.

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- Cost savings of approximately \$10,000 per year with the sharing of office equipment, utilities, janitorial services, and board room.
- A structurally sound and spacious building.

A reasonable purchase price was quickly agreed upon and a legal document drawn up that formalized joint ownership of the new building and 50/50 sharing of the capital purchase and future operating costs. With only a fresh coat of paint and new locks on the doors, in December of 2004 the Town and the RM moved into their new 2,500 square foot municipal office, almost twice the area of their previous offices.

The Town and the RM retained ownership of their former office buildings both of which were immediately occupied by organizations in need of suitable office space. The Grandview and District Community Resource Council located in the “old” Town office while the Parkland Agricultural Resources Co-Operative moved into the “old” RM office. The rental income realized from these two tenants more than offsets the costs of operating and maintaining the buildings.

The councils are now considering further development for the new office building by turning part of the finished basement into an emergency operations centre. A bank of phone lines has been installed and the basement already has a kitchen facility.

The Town and the RM of Grandview enjoy the benefits of working together. Joint council meetings are held approximately four times each year when shared services and other items of similar interest are discussed. The cooperation between the two municipalities has been economically beneficial. More importantly, it has been instrumental in forming a “sense of community” by improving communication and building a partnership between the two municipalities.

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Both councils agree that partnerships are essential to maintain the level of services now available and to ensure continued success into the future.

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.