

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

SERVICE SHARING:

Partners in Sewage Hauling

The R.M.s of Armstrong, Gimli and Coldwell, and the Towns of Arborg and Teulon

For more than three years, the council of the R.M. of Armstrong debated building a centrally-located lagoon to ensure ratepayers were disposing of sewage waste in an environmentally-friendly manner. Environmental regulations in Manitoba require every municipality to provide a method of sewage waste disposal within its jurisdiction. However, property owners in the municipality each had separate arrangements for sewage hauling and no synchronized hauling strategy existed. Council felt that it could serve its ratepayers better and more cost-effectively by developing a coordinated and viable solution to sewage hauling in the municipality.

Council soon learned that constructing a lagoon would be a major undertaking, with many challenges: the soil in the proposed site was not suitable for a lagoon and being a geographically large municipality (1865 km²), a centrally-located lagoon would still be a long haul for ratepayers located on the edges of the municipality.

Rather than undertaking the costly infrastructure investment on its own and to overcome the above challenges, the R.M. of Armstrong approached its neighbours, the Towns of Teulon and Arborg and the R.M.s of Coldwell and Gimli, and proposed to rent their neighbouring municipalities' lagoons. After a few months of friendly negotiating, agreements to haul sewage were finalized and signed in July 2002. In Armstrong, catchment areas were formed for sewage to be hauled to the nearest lagoon. The sewage hauling lengths were decreased significantly from the original central storage proposal. Council could also be sure that provincial environmental regulations were being met and there was a co-ordinated sewage disposal option available for ratepayers to properly dispose of waste.

Council considered building a lagoon, but realized it would be costly to construct and maintain. Council agreed there was a more cost-effective solution available – one that would be even more convenient for the majority of ratepayers.

This innovative approach was chosen not only for its immediate paybacks, but for longer-term benefits as well.

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This innovative approach was chosen not only for its immediate paybacks, but for longer term benefits as well. Not only would Armstrong residents benefit from efficient service delivery and shorter hauling distances, but also long-term cost savings as a result of not having to pay for lagoon construction. The approach also provided benefit to the partnering municipalities as it helped defray the cost of lagoon operation in each municipality. Since the partners were able to provide excess storage capacity to Armstrong, it made sense for Armstrong to buy into that capacity, rather than go at it alone.

The arrangement has worked very well so far, and has achieved its aim of providing efficient sewage service to Armstrong residents and businesses and financial benefits for all five municipalities. More importantly, it provides long-term cost savings for all municipalities involved and shows the commitment of each municipality to work cooperatively with its neighbours.

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