

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

BETTER MUNICIPAL BUSINESS PRACTICES: Going “Paperless” The City of Brandon

Protecting the environment is important and local governments can play a vital role in encouraging citizens to adopt environmentally sustainable waste management practices. The City of Brandon has been a leader in Manitoba’s recycling movement and in 2007 the Council implemented a new program to reduce waste generated by City operations and to save money. They accomplished this by going where few municipalities have gone before – completely paperless.

Brandon is home to a state-of-the art material recycling facility and since 2003 residents have had access to curbside collection of household waste, yard waste, and recyclables. In January 2007, City Council launched a new waste reduction program to minimize the paper used by City administration. Step 1 of the program was a move from paper to e-mail for most internal and external City communications. This change was a success as paper usage declined as well as the cost of postage and labour. This encouraged Council to continue with their plan to extend the waste reduction program even further, to City Council meetings and other areas of administration.

In April 2007, Brandon began step 2 of the paperless program. In the past, multi-page Council meeting agenda packages were photocopied, compiled and delivered to all members of City Council, City Administration and the media once per week. Council and administration agreed that providing each member of council with a laptop computer and circulating this information electronically would significantly reduce the volume of paper consumed and labour costs associated with producing the agenda packages manually. Additionally, the laptops would ensure a continuous flow of information from Administration to Council on a daily basis and would also enable them to input their own information and notes before, during and after meetings. However, in the interest of providing information to citizens that may not have access to a computer, paper copies of the agenda packages could still be requested.

Brandon has found an innovative way to reduce waste and save money – going paperless!

Making Council meeting agendas and documents available electronically enhances openness and transparency, reduces paper waste and labour costs.

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City Administration also recognized this as an opportunity to enhance openness and transparency by providing the general public with access to this information on the City's website. Council agreed that citizens were entitled to know not only their decisions, but the background information Council considered to arrive at these decisions.

City Administration immediately followed Council's lead on waste reduction and replaced their paper reports with electronic ones. Administrative reports are now prepared, submitted for approval and distributed electronically. This has resulted in additional paper and labour cost savings and has provided a seamless flow of communication from the public and administration to Council and back again. In practice, this means that, once a report has been created and approved for submission to Council, or a submission is received from the public and scanned, it is electronically integrated into the meeting agenda file for consideration and debate. Once Council deals with the report or submission, it flows electronically into the meeting minutes and to the advisory process that distributes Council's decision internally and externally.

The only cost associated with the paperless program was the \$11,000 spent to purchase laptops for each of the eleven council members. In terms of cost savings, going paperless has allowed Brandon to save \$2,029.96 annually on paper and paper delivery costs. It has also allowed Brandon to reduce staff hours for photocopying and paper package creation, for an estimated annual savings of \$9,312. Together, this adds up to \$11,300 in costs savings in the first year alone, \$300 more than the cost of purchasing the laptops. This, combined with the priceless environmental savings, has made for a very successful and innovative program.

Brandon's advice for other municipalities that might be interested in adopting a paperless strategy is "keep it simple." Through this simple strategy, Brandon has been able to bring about increased efficiencies and ease of access for Council, City Administration and the public they serve. The City of Brandon Council and Administration are very proud of the initiatives they have taken to reduce waste and to set a responsible environmental example for their residents. The money saved is an added bonus.

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The initiative fits in well with Brandon's desire to be environmentally responsible.

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.