

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

SERVICE SHARING:

Joint Public Works Department The Village of Cartwright and the RM of Roblin

In 2001, the Village of Cartwright and the RM of Roblin merged their public works departments. These municipalities, located 100 kilometres south and east of Brandon, have a history of working together - they have shared the services of a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) for the past 20 years and a municipal office for even longer.

Cartwright and Roblin were seeking ways to enhance the quality of service that ratepayers receive for the money spent on public works service. The Rural Municipality was also interested in extending service to new areas where there was demand for garbage pickup and recycling services. However, because the 2 municipalities are smaller (Roblin, population 955 and Cartwright, population 304) and had very small public works departments that could not individually meet these goals (Roblin had 2 full time employees and seasonal staff, and Cartwright had only 1 full time employee and seasonal staff), alternative approaches had to be considered.

At the request of the 2 municipal councils, the joint administrative staff together with the public works staff explored how combining the public works departments might work. Key was the examination of issues such as service expansion, cost sharing, and shared management and staffing of the department.

Service enhancement/expansion was the primary reason for sharing service. Areas where there was duplication of equipment and functions were identified and the potential for cost savings that could be invested in municipal services was determined. For example, separate contracts to provide for garbage collection and recycling service in each municipality could be combined, to streamline service and reduce costs. Materials could also be purchased in bulk. The projected annual savings from combining garbage/recycling services was more than \$5,000 - more than 20% savings compared to the cost of operating separate departments (previous combined budget of \$23,000). Councils were excited about the possibility of using potential savings to enhance municipal services - in effect delivering better service to ratepayers for the same cost.

Cost sharing was a major issue. An arrangement already existed where the Village rented equipment from the RM at such a rate that generated a small amount of net revenue for the RM. It was proposed that this arrangement be retained, but that rental rates be lowered enough to a breakeven point that would still ensure that Roblin's operating and maintenance costs were covered.

Exploring a merger of public works services was logical, given the municipalities' lengthy history of co-operation.



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Management of a combined public works department was another major issue. The proposal suggested that Roblin's foreman manage the combined department. The foreman would continue to be a paid employee of Roblin, but would be responsible for developing a work plan that reflected and prioritized the needs of the region, regardless of which municipality the work was in.

It was also proposed that staff would continue to be employed by their respective municipalities, but would serve both municipalities. The foreman could assign them to work where they were needed most, whether in the RM or the Village. By concentrating resources in this way, regional priorities (such as clean up after a storm) could be looked after more quickly and disruption to ratepayers minimized. This aspect was key to the communities' plan to enhance the service provided to ratepayers without a cost increase.

The case for merging the public works departments was strong and the 2 municipal councils decided to proceed. The merger formally took place in 2001.

The results of the merger have so far been positive for Cartwright and Roblin. Projected cost savings are being realized in both the Village and the RM. More importantly to the councils, however, is that these savings have been used to improve and increase the service they are able to offer. Curbside garbage and recycling collection services have been extended to 80 previously unserved households in the RM, the frequency of curbside pickup in Cartwright has increased (from biweekly to weekly), and the joint municipal recycling depot has been renovated. Ratepayers can now receive a same-day response to a call to the public works department (versus next day, previously). Bigger public works tasks like tree planting can be completed more quickly. The results of working together have been very visible - 1,000 trees were planted in Cartwright last year!

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Sharing a public works department met councils' objective and resulted in service improvements and cost savings.

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.