

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING: The New RM of Gimli

The new RM of Gimli was formed January 1, 2003, by the merger of the Town of Gimli and the RM of Gimli. Situated on the southwestern shore of Lake Winnipeg, the municipality has a population of 5,158, that increases during the summer months. The rural areas of the municipality are characterized by agriculture, several cottaging communities and, along the shore, commercial fishing, while the urban area is a major regional service centre and offers many professional as well as recreational and tourist services.

The benefits of forming as one municipality were first identified when the two municipalities had partnered a few years earlier to develop a shared vision for their communities. The municipalities soon understood that their ability to capitalize on economic development opportunities for the region could be more effective if a single government could promote and optimize the attractions and strengths of both the urban and rural areas.

The already strong relationship between the town and the rural municipality was developed over many decades, and the communities were already partners in many ways. Municipal service sharing agreements were in place in several areas (fire protection, recreation, waste management, planning) and many successful joint projects had already been undertaken (construction of the district recreation centre, the fire hall, the library and the floodway). To fully meet the goals outlined in the strategic vision, however, the councils thought it was necessary for the municipalities to merge.

The process of working towards a municipal merger took several years and involved extensive consultation with the public, executives of local organizations, as well as cottage owner associations. The feedback received through these consultations was extremely useful because it allowed council members to define and understand areas of concern and, most importantly, consider options for how to address those concerns.

Through the consultation process, three key issue areas soon emerged.

The effect on property taxes was the question most commonly asked by ratepayers. To get a clear picture of the financial implications of a merger, the councils hired a consultant to develop a projected budget for a combined municipality. The councils were therefore able to confirm their own analysis that property taxes would not increase because of the merger.

Community leaders shared a vision that one local government for Gimli would enable the two communities to build on their history of cooperation and optimize economic development opportunities for the region.

Community forums were an opportunity for community leaders to share their vision, explain the process for restructuring, and gave residents the opportunity to ask questions.

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Maintaining the identity of the urban community was also an issue. To address this concern the restructuring proposal provided, as a transitional measure, for the creation of a Local Urban District (LUD) consistent with the boundaries of the former town. The LUD provided the mechanism for formal representation and also recognized the different service levels desired in the urban area.

Given the October 2002 municipal general election, the timing of the merger process was a final concern raised by the councils. The restructuring agreement was successfully concluded before the election so that a new council for the merged municipality could be elected at the usual time. To facilitate a smooth transition to a single municipality, the terms of the councils of the former rural municipality and town were extended to December 31, 2002 and the new council took office January 1st, 2003, when the new municipality was officially established. During the post-election period (between late October and December 31, 2002) the newly elected council met to prepare for the commencement of their term.

The new RM of Gimli is excited about what the future holds. Using its vision as a guide, the community looks forward to being better able to promote its natural advantages and explore new economic development opportunities. Certainly there have been some transitional challenges associated with the merger of these municipalities – however most of these were known beforehand and strategies were adopted to ensure that they do not become insurmountable. While working through these transitional challenges, the RM of Gimli continues to focus its efforts on the future and the endless potential for growth and vitality.

For more information contact:

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***Working together,
community
leaders found
effective solutions
to local
challenges.***

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