

# Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



## *Tools for Change*

### **BETTER MUNICIPAL BUSINESS PRACTICES: Municipal Strategic Plan The RM of Langford**

The Rural Municipality (RM) of Langford, located in mid-western Manitoba, is home to nearly 800 residents who make their living mainly from farming or other agricultural activities. Council is committed to implementing good municipal business practices and providing effective and efficient governance for its citizens, and recently implemented a strategic plan to help the municipality develop goals and plan for the future.

The idea for a strategic plan began in 2006, with the election of two new members to council. These newly elected officials provided a fresh perspective and encouraged council to consider developing a four-year municipal strategic plan to coincide with their term of office. They were familiar with the strategic planning process and believed that a plan for the municipality would help to provide Council with clear direction on decision-making for the future. A plan would allow them to identify municipal goals in areas such as economic development, infrastructure improvements, and financial planning as well as ways to measure progress on these goals.

At first, some members of council were apprehensive, as this would be the municipality's first strategic plan. However, council realized that a municipal strategic plan would be a necessary first step to encouraging municipal cooperation on a regional basis. This was important to the RM due to the successful service sharing agreements currently in place between Langford and the Town of Neepawa, and the potential benefits that could be achieved through other proposed projects and service sharing opportunities with Neepawa and other neighbouring municipalities.

The first step in the process was hiring a facilitator, a local resident trained in the strategic planning process. The facilitator then conducted a public "visioning" process, open to all citizens, and structured to encourage discussion and brainstorming on ideas for the future, and not focusing on problems from the past.

*The RM of Langford council realized that a developing a municipal strategic plan could be the first step towards a regional plan.*

*Public involvement would be a critical component of the strategic planning process, enhancing openness and transparency providing valuable input from the citizen point of view.*



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Council understood that public involvement would be critical to enhance openness and transparency and provide valuable input from the citizen point of view. Neighbouring municipal council representatives were also invited to participate with the hope that they would appreciate the benefit of strategic planning for their own municipalities and a regional plan for the future.

Following the public consultation process council and three staff members developed the strategic plan document, defining specific goals that included:

- Establishing a residential development in the RM;
- Encouraging business development;
- Extending the rural water line system into other areas of the RM;
- Recreational planning, hiking trails, etc;
- Road building and maintenance planning; and
- Capital purchase planning.

Since its creation, council has actively used the goals developed in its strategic plan when preparing their annual operating and capital budgets and when considering new initiatives for the municipality. In February 2009, council held another public meeting to report to citizens on the progress of the plan, with all members of council actively participating by reporting on a section of the plan. This “follow up” meeting generated further public interest and support and council intends to continue holding strategic planning meetings annually with their citizens. To further enhance public interest and awareness, the plan is posted on the municipal website.

The RM of Langford council agrees that its strategic planning process has been a great success. The process was affordable, at a cost of \$2,500, and has provided a number of benefits for the community. These include:

- A greater sense of direction for council and municipal staff;
- Increased ratepayer confidence in council through public participation in a transparent and inclusive process;
- Goals to measure progress; and
- Improved relationships and communications with neighbouring municipalities.

Through its experience with strategic planning, Langford council has come to recognize the value of planning in all aspects of municipal governance, programming, and administration. The RM of Langford and the Town of Neepawa councils are now working on a joint strategic plan and are looking forward to involve other neighbouring municipalities in a regional strategic planning process in the future.

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*Council has actively used the goals developed in its strategic plan to help prepare the municipality’s annual budget and in the consideration of new ideas for Langford.*

*For more information on better municipal business practices, Successful Municipal Practices, and the Tools for Change*