

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges



Tools for Change

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING:

The New Municipality of Shoal Lake

The RM of Shoal Lake and the Town of Shoal Lake

The Town of Shoal Lake and the Rural Municipality (RM) of Shoal Lake amalgamated on January 1, 2011. Located in southwestern Manitoba approximately 300 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg and 110 kilometres northwest of Brandon, agriculture and tourism are the driving force of the economy in these communities.

The idea of amalgamation had been a matter of discussion in the Town and the RM for at least 30 years. The population of both municipalities was small, totaling approximately 1,250 residents evenly distributed between the Town and the RM. Residents were served by a combined total of 10 Councillors, one Mayor and one Reeve, meaning one elected representative for every 100 residents. While the Town and the RM shared a number of services and facilities, including a library, civic centre, fire department, landfill site, and a community development corporation, municipal office services were duplicated. Residents also often faced delays in decision-making because of the separate elected councils.

Both Councils felt that by combining resources, they would be able to better position themselves for the future and respond to community needs. Serious discussions on amalgamation began in 2005; a logical next step given that the municipalities already shared many services.

Over the next few years, Councils developed their amalgamation proposal and implemented a public consultation process to present their proposal to the community. Both Councils recognized that citizen support for the amalgamation would be a key ingredient in making the amalgamation a success. Several jointly hosted public meetings were held to discuss the idea of amalgamation and to provide citizens the opportunity to ask questions.

The legislated process for the amalgamation was completed before the October 2010 general municipal election to enable the new council for the merged municipality to be elected at the usual time. To ensure a smooth transition to a single municipality, the councils of the former Town and RM were extended to the end of December 2010 and the new council of the amalgamated municipality took office on January 1, 2011 when the new municipality was officially established.

The Town and RM of Shoal Lake decided to amalgamate to form the new Municipality of Shoal Lake, effective January 1, 2011.

Amalgamation made sense for the municipalities, as they have successfully cooperated to deliver services to citizens for many years.



Tools for Change

Successful Municipal Practices: Responding to New Challenges

There was a great deal of interest in the two communities in the election for the new Council, with almost 60% of eligible voters voting in the election.

An important goal of the amalgamation was the opportunity to make governance more effective and efficient for the Town and the RM. Some benefits have already been realized:

- Through municipal restructuring, the number of administrative staff was reduced from 4 full-time positions to 3.4 positions, saving \$20,000 in operating costs. Two CAO positions were transitioned to one, and one Assistant CAO position was replaced with a receptionist.
- Elimination of 5 council positions saved almost \$30,000 per year in Councillor indemnities, and over \$10,000 per year for travel expenses, advertising, council memberships, and registration.
- Communication efficiency was improved and waste was reduced by fully implementing paperless meetings; an initiative that the RM and the Town began in 2008.

Overall, these efficiencies will provide an extra \$60,000 each year that can now be allocated to community projects.

Also, since amalgamation, the new Municipality has eliminated the need for joint Council meetings that were held between 5 and 9 times per year, streamlining and speeding up the decision-making process.

The Council, administrative staff and Public Works of the new Municipality have worked hard to ensure that amalgamation was a success. The new Municipality of Shoal Lake is functioning effectively and has experienced few, if any, transitional problems. The communities also are pleased with the current and projected future cost savings and efficiencies as a result of amalgamation.

For more information contact: Don Yanick
Municipality of Shoal Lake
(204)759-2565
E-mail: shoalake@goinet.ca

By amalgamating, the Councils are projecting a cost savings of \$60,000 per year in operating and administrative costs. Governance of the new Municipality will also be simpler and more efficient.

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.