

Saskatchewan Municipal **Best Practice**

Joint Use Agreement

CONTACT

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Project Date: Signed November 26, 2012; implemented January 1, 2013

THE PRACTICE

The City of Humboldt successfully proposed and influenced the decision to link together the new Catholic high school, Carlton Trail Regional College (CTRC), and the Humboldt Uniplex. The physical integration of these facilities was viewed as an innovative and forward-looking outcome for a mid-sized city such as Humboldt.

Construction began in 2010. The city then proposed a harmonized agreement around facility use to allow for enhanced and increased use of the linked facilities. This plan addressed the growing city's need to offer under-used space for community use. It served to further strengthen community connections, preserve resources, reduce costs, and increase opportunities for sport, recreational and cultural activities.

THE PROCESS

The City of Humboldt took a leadership role to ensure the new facilities would serve the community in the best possible way. Physically linking the buildings ensured increased access, as did the joint-use agreements negotiated between all parties. Mayor and council led the process, with support from city administration (the city manager and director of community and leisure services were the primary staff assisting). Staff and council arranged and advanced discussions. They began by collaborating with all parties, and then creating committees – a Joint Use Agreement Committee and a Joint Use Operating Committee – to work through the process. Representatives on the agreement committees came from senior levels of the four organizations (the city, Horizon School Division, Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division, and Carlton Trail Regional College). The operating committee included broader community representation on top of the four core partners.

Each organization was expected to regularly report to their respective governing bodies/boards on progress made, and collaborate on important issues or concerns. Matters relating to liability, insurance, maintenance, supervision, and related activities were independently researched and reviewed by each organization, and then discussed by the appropriate committees. That is, each organization was expected to conduct an internal, informal review about items they needed addressed, along with areas of potential partnership. As these discussions progressed, each committee reviewed and recommended items to be considered in the master joint-use agreement and the joint-use operating agreement.

Once they had decided to physically link the facilities, consultations began to figure out what an agreement might look like and how it could be managed. School boards, city council, and the various administrations – including staff – were consulted. Then came a Memorandum of Understanding, solidifying how the parties would work together in good faith. It also included that the new relationship required a specific joint-use operating agreement. After the groups adopted the MOU, the operating committee started working out the details of the operating agreement, which focused on administration (how the groups would

work together on facility operations, financial and managerial duties). The agreement committee started work on a document covering how the groups would share the facilities – a document focused on governance.

All the groups involved are large, multi-departmental, public institutions. This created challenges in keeping the project moving, sharing information and making decisions quickly, and working through the details of finances and implementation. Getting buy in and support took considerable effort and advocacy.

THE RESULTS

The Joint Use Operating Agreement was signed in January 2012, before the school opened. On April 2, 2012, the grand opening of the new Humboldt Collegiate Institute and Carlton Trail Regional College was celebrated. In November 2012, the master Joint Use Agreement was officially signed by all organizations – the City of Humboldt, Horizon School Division, Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division and Carlton Trail Regional College. Formal implementation of the master Joint Use Agreement began January 1, 2013.

Overall, the joint-use practice has been enthusiastically received by the community. Additional school spaces are now open to the public for community use and students have increased access to city facilities during the day. Non-profit community organizations are able to use the facilities at no charge; for-profit groups and private functions are charged a fee. The groups have found ways to work together on issues like reserving space, managing the space during bookings, food facilities and vending machines, indoor and outdoor maintenance and janitorial work, and upgrades to the facility (a new fitness room).

The groups have committed to annual review by all parties, and changes to the governing documents will be made as needs arise and issues change. The two committees continue to meet regularly.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Identifying and having principal decision-makers involved in the process early helps ensure information reaches the correct persons so that discussion progresses on important issues.
- An organization has to be willing to take the lead to manage the discussion process; ensure the joint use discussion remains a priority to all organizations.
- Creating an MOU prior to developing a joint-use agreement and an operating agreement ensured that organizations were at the table in good faith, and that the concept and practices remained in place, even in the event of staff, council, board, or administrative changes.
- Be prepared for the long haul. It was very important to manage expectations during this process as determining everything from financial implications to implementation logistics were not things easily discussed – let alone agreed upon – with multiple partners at the table.
- Take a critical look at your facilities; create a baseline of use, if possible. As joint-use agreements allow communities to capitalize on new or existing infrastructure, look for ways to enhance space to offer year-round programs that serve all age groups.
- Be open to change. Plans change. Community issues and needs change. Maintaining some flexibility to changing circumstances allows for a better process and a better outcome in the end.
- Continue to cultivate the school-municipal relationship. In this case, stronger relationships are helping Humboldt schools and the community better communicate their needs along with identifying current – and future – opportunities for shared development.
- Ensure everyone has the same goals and objectives. If they don't, do you have the right people at the table?
- Bring in staff that will be charged with the actual implementation of such an agreement earlier in the process; this creates greater internal buy-in along with adding additional perspective to the discussions.
- Partners need to communicate so that everyone understands the long-term benefits of the agreement and the partnership.
- Increased communication to the general public on the process and the benefits such an agreement would have for the community.