

Best Practice

Collaborative Office Expansion Project

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THE PRACTICE

The Rural Municipalities of Buckland and Prince Albert have shared an office facility since 1967. With the recent expansion of the municipalities' service provisions, which include a District Planning Commission and Rural Water Board, it became apparent that additional office space was needed to meet the needs of increased responsibility. The project began as a need to accommodate areas of expansion, but through the development process, a redesigned energy efficient building with increased office space was decided upon.

THE PROCESS

Local community leaders reviewed their options and determined to create efficiencies, demonstrate leadership in the community, and protect the environment by implementing a geo-thermal heating system in addition to increasing office space. An engineering firm was contracted to provide an assessment of the existing office building to determine possible courses of action and costs for renovations versus construction of a new building. It was felt that the continued benefits of shared equipment, staffing and records in the joint office were too much to lose by moving to a new location. Among other concepts, specific attention was given to efficient heating and lighting. The central location in the City of Prince Albert allowed ratepayers to continue using the same facility as a one-stop centre for municipal services.

THE RESULTS

Through the design and planning process, the efficiencies of joint offices became very apparent. In addition to the continued savings through shared equipment, staffing costs and rent, heating costs have been reduced significantly with the geo-thermal heating system. Council and administration save time and money by not having to travel to separate offices for meetings. Ratepayers also save time by not having to drive to a new location outside of the City of Prince Albert for municipal services and have expressed an appreciation that municipal costs are being shared by both municipalities.

LESSONS LEARNED

The RMs of Buckland and Prince Albert have learned that ratepayers continue to prefer the convenience of a shared municipal office. The combined effort made by the RMs to deliver cost effective services for the ratepayers has allowed the RMs to focus on additional projects that may not have otherwise been possible.

The minor inconveniences experienced by municipal staff and ratepayers during renovations of the municipal office have been offset by the appreciation of the newly expanded and renovated office. In hindsight, it may have been more beneficial to municipal staff and ratepayers to move into a temporary office during renovations, however both parties displayed a great deal of patience until the renovations were complete.