

Best Practice

North of Divide Community Association

CONTACT

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THE PRACTICE

The North of the Divide Community Association (NODCA) is a regional association made up of 8 municipalities including the Rural Municipalities of Beaver River, Meadow Lake, and Loon Lake, the City of Meadow Lake, and the Villages of Goodsoil, Dorintosh, Loon Lake, and Pierceland. NODCA was formed by the member municipalities, all of which are experiencing rapid growth, and were unable to supply required services to ratepayers. The association was formed in order to share resources and cost share services that the area needs.

THE PROCESS

In January, 2010 the RM of Meadow Lake sent letters to the surrounding municipalities including the Rural Municipalities of Beaver River and Loon Lake, the City of Meadow Lake, and the Villages of Dorintosh, Goodsoil, Loon Lake, Makwa, and Pierceland, and the surrounding area First Nations. Discussion began with the idea of creating a regional organization that could be used to offer a regional perspective on issues facing each municipality, and the possibility of sharing resources to cost share services.

From this meeting, support was offered from all participating municipalities. First Nations initially offered support but have not opted to join NODCA or participate in any future meetings. Once a regular membership was formed, the group contacted the Municipal Capacity Development Program (MCDP) to facilitate organizing the NODCA board. A Memorandum of Understanding was also signed and a Community Action Plan was completed. The NODCA board met on March 24, 2011 to review the draft District Planning Commission Agreement. At this time, all member municipalities will be submitting for council's approval.

So far NODCA has taken the following steps:

- January, 2010 First Meeting held in Meadow Lake
- July, 2010 Community Action Plan Completed
- September, 2010 Memorandum of Understanding Signed
- November, 2010 EMO workshop held to inform councils of roles and responsibilities regarding Emergency Measure Organization
- February 1, 2011 Administrator/Junior Planner hired to complete office duties required by NODCA
- February 16, 2011 Contract awarded to a Planning Consultant to complete a Regional Official Community Plan and to update all Zoning Bylaws. (City of Meadow Lake will have their own OCP)
- March 24, 2011 Draft District Planning Commission Agreement reviewed and agreed upon. It has now gone back to individual councils for their approval.

THE RESULTS

The pros of implementing this practice are to share services and knowledge in an affordable way without compromising local autonomy. The con is that current legislation under *The Planning and Development Act, 2007* requires the area to have a regional OCP with schedules of policies for specific municipalities attached, which will require complementary resolutions on any changes whether or not it may only affect one municipality. Another major drawback is that there is no legislation that will allow a group of municipalities to form an organization in order to hire employees directly without establishing a corporation or planning district.

Cost sharing of services has also led to a number of other positive outcomes:

1. Hiring one consultant to complete a Regional OCP for 7 municipalities and an individual OCP for the City of Meadow Lake as well as updating all municipal Zoning Bylaws. Five years ago the RM of Meadow Lake completed new OCP and zoning bylaw and costs were approximately \$80,000.00. The NODCA has hired a consultant to complete and update eight municipalities (3 rural, 4 villages and 1 city) for approximately \$165,000.00
2. Once a planning district has approval, the NODCA intends on establishing a bylaw enforcement program which will include the hiring of enforcement officers.
3. Reviewing and updating Mutual Aid agreements for Emergency Measures Organizations.
4. Establishment of Regional District Appeals Boards and a Board of Revision.
5. Sharing of information and consultation regarding all aspects of municipal government including subdivisions and developments permits, economic activity, protective services concerns, doctor retention and any other issues that may arise.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is important to request assistance from organizations such as the Municipal Development Capacity Program to help facilitate and move the regional partnership forward especially during the early stages of development. It is easy for municipalities to become overburdened with the small details and not keep moving forward. It is also important to consider all partners and not just a single municipality because it could result in the dissolution of the partnership.