

Best Practice

ALTERNATE METHOD OF UTILITY AND TAX PAYMENTS

CONTACT

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THE ISSUE

The RM of Wise Creek No. 77 is finalizing an alternate method for the ratepayers of the municipality to pay both their tax and utility bills.

The RM has developed, in conjunction with their local financial institution, a method for ratepayers to pay their tax and utility bills either online or by submitting their payment to their local financial institution, which will be accepted by the financial institution on behalf of the municipality.

THE NEED

The Village of Admiral recently dissolved into the RM. Some former village ratepayers and other ratepayers, who reside approximately 30 minutes from the RM office, asked if there was any alternate method for making payments.

CREATING THE PRACTICE

The administrator for the RM of Wise Creek researched alternatives by contacting neighbouring municipalities and numerous financial institutions. A report was created indicating the options, including costs and fees. The research indicated that some financial institutions charge monthly fees and other financial institutions offer this service free of charge. The largest task was determining the numbers and/or method that would be best for tracking purposes. It was discovered that the municipality, in setting up the financial institution to receive payments in person from ratepayers for utilities and taxes, would also be able to provide online service as well.

APPROVAL

To create and implement the practice, the council needed pass a resolution that indicated its approval of this service and with whom this service would be provided.

CONSULTATION

Since this was a low-cost item (administrative time) that would provide additional services for the ratepayers, there was no formal public consultation process. The council responded to the few concerns brought forward by providing an additional service to all ratepayers.

IMPLEMENTATION

To implement the practice, the administrator worked closely with their financial institution to set-up the service, which includes the ability to pay utilities and/or taxes either 'online' or 'in person' at the specific local financial institutions that will accept this payment on behalf of the municipality. For online payments, the administrator needed to identify the account being paid and make appropriate changes for these transactions to be recorded. The financial institution notifies the municipality of the individual payments on a regular basis via e-mail. For payments made in person, the financial institution agreed to stamp the invoice paid and notify the municipality by e-mail. In both cases the municipality issues the official receipt.

The municipality communicated the availability of this new service by placing a notice in the local newspaper, placing poster on bulletin boards, and providing a newsletter drop.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Budget

This service is being provided free of charge by the chosen financial institution. The administrative time for research and set-up was the only cost involved in this initiative.

Staff

The administrator initially researched alternatives by contacting surrounding municipalities regarding their policies. Further research involved contacting several financial institutions to review their services and costs. After reporting to council and receiving approval of council to proceed, the administrator worked closely with the chosen financial institution to ensure all aspects of the set-up were functioning effectively. The project required thorough communication within the municipality to inform the ratepayers of the availability of this new service.

EVALUATION

This service benefits both the ratepayer and the municipality. The ratepayer is receiving the convenience of online and/or neighborhood payment centers. The municipality may see some cost savings with regard to paperwork, administrative time and more timely utility and tax payments. In addition, with the proactive response to ratepayer concern, the municipality has given evidence of their open and approachable governance style and policies.

LESSONS LEARNED

Through this process, the municipality learned that they were able to access online payments, as well as 'in-person' payments to be received at the local financial institution on behalf of the municipality.