

Saskatchewan Municipal Best Practice

Community Development

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THE PRACTICE

The Town of Wapella council encouraged citizen involvement when exploring various options to revitalize the community and implemented various ideas to make the town more attractive to current and future residents.

THE PROCESS

The Town of Wapella council was forced to 'think outside the box.' The residents of Wapella and surrounding area made their voices heard to council that Wapella was slowly "dying," and that council needed to come up with some unique ideas to keep what businesses were left in town to stay in town, and to attract new people to the community.

In 2007 council mailed out a survey asking residents to submit their views on everything from the general condition of the community, what enhancements they felt were needed, to what they felt should be done with various venues in the community, including an empty town hall and local dam site. A 4 page survey was distributed to every resident with a mail box in Wapella.

The town began by clamping down on untidy lots by working heavily on tax enforcement in an effort to get some neglected lots back under control. This action did not require any new bylaws to be passed, only an increased effort on municipal staff's part to enforce local bylaws. The town used a local lawyer to assist with tax enforcement procedures in this regard.

Old, vacant houses were torn down by municipal maintenance staff and the town began selling lots for \$1 to encourage new home construction. The community ran articles in the local newspaper to keep residents informed of what council was doing in response to the survey. The town also promotes upcoming events in the newspaper, encouraging people to participate and attend in an effort to build community spirit.

Council members were encouraged to attend economic development courses and local school board meetings in an effort to promote the community and keep what recreation facilities and programs already existed. Council also requested Heritage Saskatchewan to come out and look at some of the recreational and cultural facilities in town to ensure buildings were safe for use.

THE RESULTS

The input from the survey has resulted in the following:

- Stocked the local dam with fish;
- Sold vacant lots in town for \$1;
- Cleaned up untidy lots in the community;
- The town purchasing the grocery store when the owner had passed on and there were no potential buyers;
- 3 new businesses in the community in the past year;
- Held dances in the old town hall to help raise money for these ventures; and
- Saw the local fire department triple its volunteer force, including two members of council.

This practice has created optimism that hasn't been seen in the town for over a decade. Residents now feel a sense of pride in their community, and are able to better market the town to new residents and businesses.

LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned are communication is key in a small community. Residents and council have identified community goals and everyone is working together to do their part. The community is having local people come forth and offering to do some much needed repairs in an effort to make old building and programs viable again. Council reached out to community members and acted on their responses.