

Best Practice

Renovate/Remodel Town of Watrous Civic Centre

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THE PRACTICE

The Civic Centre building was originally constructed in 1959 to house the town's municipal administration offices, local library, fire department as well as providing a large Civic Centre (capacity 400 persons) for performing arts, meetings, and weddings. The Town of Watrous decided that the time had come to renovate/remodel this vital community facility. The planning process to remodel this multi-use facility became a project in itself.

THE PROCESS

In recent years, there became a feeling throughout the community that the library and fire department in Watrous needed expansions and upgrades. The town superintendent, under the direction of town council, took the initial steps to discuss possible plans with an architect. Through discussions with the architect, town council held several public meetings to gauge the community's preference of potential renovations for the Civic Centre. There were various options debated, and in the end the community voted for the separation of the fire hall, library and town administration offices into separate buildings.

The community decided to relocate the library to another facility on Main Street. With minor renovations, the former Legion Hall provided the new library with 250% more area and maintained a central location. The move enabled the library to greatly improve services by increasing public internet access and reading material selection.

Discussions regarding a new fire department focused on the needs of the Town of Watrous and surrounding area. Town council met with elected representatives from surrounding municipalities to suggest the idea of a new, larger fire department. The local health district learned of plans to increase capacity of the fire department and asked if they could become a partner as they were looking for a storage space for two new ambulances. The end result was a new 7-bay essential services building constructed with participation from the RMs of Morris, Wood Creek, Wrexford, Usborne, Resort Village of Manitou Beach, the Town of Watrous and the health district.

The last step in the process was to renovate the existing Civic Centre. Through discussions with various community organizations that used the Civic Centre for functions and meetings, town council decided to renovate the Civic Centre with the assistance of an architect. Plans to increase the town administration offices had been an on-going concern of citizens over the years, and the town had finally budgeted for this upgrade and was able to provide the funds to follow through. Council also made the decision to increase the size of the Heritage Room, which included wireless internet access and audio/visual equipment for business meetings and presentations. A room of this nature was an ongoing priority for the local business community, and residents also voiced their support of the Heritage Room upgrade as it is often rented out for dances and weddings.

To fund this entire project, the Town of Watrous applied for and received approval under the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund authorizing a \$500,000 grant toward the \$1.9m Civic Centre project. The remainder of the funding came from various community fund raising events, such as community dances and sporting events, and the Town of Watrous budget (and participating municipalities budgets' for the new fire department).

THE RESULTS

The renovation of the Civic Centre led to six new administration offices, a seventy-five person meeting room, a community hall that holds four-hundred and forty people, a fire hall that houses all emergency response vehicles for Watrous and surrounding communities, and a library that has doubled the amount of books and reading material it can offer to area residents.

The Heritage Meeting room has increased 18% in usages over the course of two years. The Civic Centre has increased 20% over the same time span. The increase in usages reinforces the belief that the Town of Watrous is a destination and town council had foresight to recognize this fact and plan for the future growth of the community.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Town of Watrous learned that we had to be proactive in the decision to expand the administrative offices, have the foresight to recognize the need to address emergency services, and dedicate resources to improve the library in town. The renovation of the Civic Centre was needed to facilitate and plan for the future growth of the Town of Watrous.