

Partners for Climate Protection

Greenhouse Gas Reduction Initiative of the Month

Stanley, Manitoba's Paper-saving Initiatives



Municipal Profile

Population: 6,367

PCP member since: July 2009

Background

The Rural Municipality of Stanley, Manitoba, incorporated in 1890, was named in honour of Baron Frederick Stanley, the Governor General of Canada at the time. Baron Stanley was also the man who donated the Stanley Cup to the National Hockey League of Canada. Stanley, Manitoba, includes many small, unincorporated urban centres, and surrounds the Town of Morden, Manitoba, and the City of Winkler, Manitoba. A new approach to Stanley's municipal computer system helped the municipality implement paper-saving initiatives that have saved resources and time.

Implementation and Approach

In April 2008, Stanley purchased a system called All-Net from a Manitoba-based company for \$8,000. The municipality pays an annual maintenance cost for All-Net of close to \$3,000. Dale Toews, Stanley's assistant chief administrative officer, explains how the system works.

"All-Net is a web-based hosting service that lets us store our council meeting information virtually, rather than on-site," he says. "The data is stored on All-Net's servers, and they back it up for us – so it doesn't require additional computer infrastructure at our end. It is an interactive online meeting software that provides a virtual agenda with all supporting documents and correspondence. Access to certain documents and agenda items can also be limited to specific users for security purposes."

To aid the new system, Stanley purchased laptop computers, which are assigned to Stanley's seven council members for the duration of their four-year term. The inexpensive laptops require only a basic Internet connectivity and do not need faster processors or video cards. "We're a busy municipality, and we're growing," says Toews. "This was a way to organize things better and help improve council members' access to information."

Rather than print council meeting packages – which can be up to 175 pages – all council meeting work is done in an electronic environment. "When you change how you handle documents in one area of your operation, it facilitates the same change in other areas of business," says Toews. "When all council meeting information is digital, it enables other internal documents to remain in digital format." Reports to council are now created, saved, presented and filed electronically, without ever using a printer.

E-mails received from outside organizations or ratepayers are also handled electronically. "We prefer this method because it is simpler for us to process it electronically," he says. "As we move to more electronic data communication with other departments and organizations, our system becomes increasingly effective."



Council uses a web-based hosting system to reduce paper use. Photo courtesy of the Rural Municipality of Stanley, Manitoba

Toews says that Stanley opted not to enshrine its paperless initiatives in policy. “Rather than enforce a set of rules about what you can and can’t print, we approached it from a ‘buy-in’ perspective,” says Toews. “Work habits had to change; but staff understands that the All-Net system lets them work more efficiently.”

Results

Taking only council and committee meetings into account, Stanley has reduced its printing needs by at least 45,000 pages per year. This reduction equals 0.6 tons of avoided greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. (Environmental impact estimates were based on Stanley’s use of non-recycled paper and were made using the Environmental Defense Fund Paper Calculator. For more information, visit <http://www.papercalculator.org>.) Less paper also means less space is required to archive the material.

Preparing one paper council meeting package used to take one staff member a full workday to complete – and that did not include changes made to the package after it was finalized. “You had to gather copy and organize the documents, then file them all in binders, then distribute the binders to council members – or wait for them to drive to the office to pick up their binder,” he says. “We no longer have to do that.” Toews estimates the new system enables each of the seven Stanley councillors to avoid driving, on average, 50 kilometres per month (25-km average trip, twice monthly, for a total of 350 km/month) to pick up their council packages. The fuel efficiency of an average light-duty vehicle is approximately 38 litres per 350 km – totaling 456 litres of gasoline avoided per year (38 litres x 12 months). For each litre of gasoline driven, 0.00236 tonnes of GHG emissions are produced. Therefore, average avoided GHG emissions would be about 1 tonne per year (0.00236 x 456 litres).

The All-Net system allows users to log in to the meeting site from any location; during the meeting, councillors have access to all document folders. Less follow-up time is therefore required after meetings, because all tasks, resolutions and minutes are prepared and filed electronically.

As a result of Stanley’s efforts, other groups that the municipality regularly deals with are exploring electronic meeting opportunities. “We’ve been fielding numerous calls from other organizations making a similar transition,” says Toews.

Lessons Learned

Toews says going paperless impacts everything the municipality does. “A lot of correspondence is still paper-based, so you have to develop a process to digitize it. Get a good scanner!” he recommends. “That being said, there are some things that still need to be printed. You need to know what needs to be printed, and what doesn’t. Just don’t overdo the push for paperless, because it can work against you. Let people see the advantages for themselves, and it will take off.”

Those not as familiar with technology struggled at first with the new system. “There are different levels of computer literacy and interest,” says Toews, “and if you take a fast and furious approach, individuals who aren’t quite as keen to enter the electronic age will get frustrated. Make it easy, make it simple and start small. Once people saw how it could make their lives easier, we had buy-in.”

Especially important for rural municipalities is Internet availability. “There have been some mornings when the Internet has been down,” says Toews. “If you’re going with a web-based program, ensure you have solid Internet connections at the office – and that councillors have a solid connection at home.

“Make sure you save your information locally, so that a loss of connectivity doesn’t shut down your whole council meeting,” he adds. “We have used All-Net’s backup feature on occasion, which is as simple as plugging in a flash drive that contains all the meeting information.”

Future Direction

Toews says council members are continually asking for additional documentation and information to be transferred to the All-Net system. Over time, there will be increased use of the system and its applications. “The municipality is contemplating making more meeting information available to the public, at both the committee and council levels,” he says. “A system such as All-Net allows for that to happen quite simply.”

Further Information

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The Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program is a network of Canadian municipal governments that have committed to reducing greenhouse gases and acting on climate change. PCP is the Canadian component of ICLEI's Cities for Climate Protection (CCP) network, which involves more than 900 communities worldwide. PCP is a partnership between the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. PCP receives financial support from FCM's Green Municipal Fund.