



Leaders at the Core of Better Communities

2012 Annual Awards Program

Program Excellence Awards Nomination Form

Deadline for Nominations: March 16, 2012

Complete this form (sections 1 and 2) and submit with your descriptive narrative.

SECTION 1: Information About the Nominated Program

Program Excellence Award Category (*select only one*):

- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnership
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Name of program being nominated: Covington-Maple Valley Partnership Program

Jurisdiction(s) where program originated: Covington, Wash.

Jurisdiction population(s): 17,500

Please indicate the month and year in which the program you are nominating was fully implemented. (Note: All Program Excellence Award nominations must have been fully implemented by or before January 31, 2011, to be eligible. The start date should not include the initial planning phase.)

Month: January Year: 2011

Name(s) and title(s) of individual(s) who should receive recognition for this award at the ICMA Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona, October 2012. (Each individual listed MUST be an ICMA member to be recognized.):

Name: Derek Matheson

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: Covington, Wash.

Name: David Johnston

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: Maple Valley, Wash.

Name: _____

Title: _____ Jurisdiction: _____

SECTION 2: Information About the Nominator/Primary Contact

Name of contact: Derek Matheson

Title: City Manager Jurisdiction: Covington, Wash.

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Covington-Maple Valley Partnership Program

ICMA 2012 Annual Awards Program Submittal

Problem

The economy's state of despair has been putting municipalities across the country into precarious positions. Our goals have always boiled down to providing our citizens with quality public service aimed at improving their quality of life. Over the past several years these goals have remained the same but revenues have changed dramatically. Increasing state mandates and decreasing revenues have been prompting municipalities to rethink budgets and causing some cities to decide what services to cut and which staff to layoff. The adjacent cities of Covington and Maple Valley, Wash. have been put in this same position. However, making service cuts and halting forward progress was never deemed appropriate by their leadership.

The City of Covington tenders a large concentration of retail outlets and the area's bulk of medical service providers. Maple Valley harbors numerous recreational opportunities and maintains a small town atmosphere amidst a growing commercial segment. One of two main corridors to Maple Valley is through Covington and one of Covington's largest outside suppliers of shoppers and drivers are residents of Maple Valley. The two cities are similar in size and demographics and the offerings of each tend to complement the other well – making an integrated partnership between the two worth considering.

For municipalities, working together hasn't always been encouraged. Every city has its own identity and they are proud of it. But, both Covington and Maple Valley felt it was necessary to coordinate their efforts to creatively search for new ways to leverage taxpayer dollars. The cities were finding that grant monies were disappearing and inflation was eroding the costs of the monies that remained. Furthermore, increased taxes at all levels of government were creating a sentiment among citizens that they were getting too little for too much. Cuts at the state and county levels were causing municipalities to bear a big brunt of the budget crisis.

With the uncertainties that the economy had to offer, the two cities chose a proactive approach to soften the blow on their respective jurisdictions. The cities recognized a chance to continue to provide quality

service to its residents while staying engaged in building opportunities for the cities' futures. Thus, a municipal partnership between the cities of Covington and Maple Valley was born.

Implementation & Costs

The foundation of Covington and Maple Valley's partnership has been building over the past few years. Over that time, other governmental entities have joined in on differing elements of their partnership, which has only made the effects stronger. In the past year, however, the two cities have seen the successes of partnering in the areas of transportation, animal control, parks and trails, and public works as a result of joining forces.

It was the actions that the cities took back in July 2008 that turned their neighborly dispositions into the successful partnership of today. Covington's Mayor had urged staff to work at improving communications between the cities. Staff proceeded by setting a joint council meeting to help foster the flow of communications. The first meeting focused on transportation issues and extended to a third neighboring city – Black Diamond. All three cities had individual transportation plans and each plan included better transit service.

Overall, the three cities felt that meeting together was a sensible idea and an annual Tri-City Meeting was developed. In subsequent meetings, discussions focused on furthering transportation initiatives, educating the cities on each others' parks and trails plans, collaborating on public works infrastructure, and exploring regional animal control options.

Because of the obvious connection between the three cities' transit goals, the result of that first meeting was the implementation of a workgroup to explore transit options, specifically the feasibility of adding a Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) commuter rail system to an existing rail corridor that connects the three cities. One of Covington's council members assembled the initial workgroup. The workgroup included an elected official and staff from each city, including the City of Auburn where a DMU system would connect to the regional commuter rail system. The partnership enticed other entities to join including: Washington State Department of Transportation, Puget Sound Regional Council, Sound Transit, King County Metro Transit, the Port of Seattle and Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railroad. The workgroup, now known as the SEATS

(Southeast Area Transportation Solutions) Coalition, has lobbied extensively to further transportation initiatives in the region.

Just as with the transportation plans, the three cities' parks, recreation and trail plans were very similar too. The cities realized that they could create connections among each of the trails by working together on an overarching plan, instead of working individually and exclusive of each other. A planning team of parks and recreation directors from Covington, Maple Valley and Black Diamond was implemented to explore ways to improve trail connections between the cities and pursue funding to do that.

In public works, the cost of doing work whether in-house or via contract have constantly been increasing and the need for services like street overlays, asphalt patching, street sweeping, storm sewer cleaning, and mowing haven't gone away. These services in the two cities were going to suffer because the status quo could no longer sustain the level of service that the public deserved, so Covington and Maple Valley's public works departments joined forces to work on combating these issues. The two cities began looking at economies of scale and sharing services as a way to save money without compromising levels of service. In 2011, an interlocal agreement between the two cities was signed.

Both cities contracted with Regional Animal Services of King County (RASKC) for animal control. Budget cuts at the county level instigated a restructuring of RASKC and the costs were handed down to the member cities. The increase in cost to each city just to maintain the animal services contract was over \$30,000. Together the cities, including Black Diamond and Enumclaw worked to explore and compare options like staying with the county or creating their own joint animal services entity.

Overall, there have been no monetary costs in developing this partnership program. Strategizing between the two cities requires some additional staff time, but any costs there have been negated by the overall cost savings realized through the partnership.

Outcomes

The partnership between Covington and Maple Valley has led to a fundamental change in the way each approaches regional matters today. The increasingly unstable economy has painted a grim picture for the cities' short and long term futures. Cities alone are unable to affect change at the county, state or federal

levels, but together, the cities of Covington and Maple Valley have managed to change their course through the power of a partnership.

The cities have seen success in securing money from the state and federal government for a DMU feasibility study. With a concerted regional effort, the SEATS Coalition acquired a \$400,000 state appropriation and a \$360,000 federal appropriation to conduct the studies. The state monies paid for the initial feasibility study that found DMU to be feasible in the long term, but in the short term there was a desperate need for improved transit service. These findings have shifted the coalition's focus to building better relationships with transit providers in the region and resulted in an additional grant for King County Metro Transit to increase service specifically to the cities of Covington and Maple Valley – a very tangible outcome for the residents who rely on transit services.

Together, the parks and recreation directors approached King County who was planning to extend their Cedar to Green River trail just outside of the city limits. The cities presented their trails plans and suggested how to integrate all of them which prompted the county to include the proposal in a \$117,000 feasibility study that they are currently conducting – money that the cities do not have to come up with to further their trail initiatives.

Joining service contracts between Covington and Maple Valley in maintenance have allowed the cities to receive volume discounts in street sweeping and storm sewer cleaning while providing a better quality of service due to the increased purchasing power. The administrative costs of managing the contracts were also reduced because only one contract had to be managed by one person.

Furthermore, the cities found that the two public works crews complemented each other well – where one crew lacked in experience, knowledge or equipment, the other was able to fill in the gap. The crews were joined together to work on street overlays and asphalt patching in each city instead of hiring outside contractors so they were no longer paying the contractors' overhead which allowed them to save money. Traditionally, the cities have limped along, just repairing roads where needed. Joining the crews provided more manpower to complete the projects in less time, allowing the cities to double the square miles of paving than they have done in the past. This increased level of service extends the life of the roadways

and slows the deterioration process, preventing more costly repairs more often – which the cities could not afford.

In response to rising animal-control costs, the cities of Covington, Maple Valley, Black Diamond, and Enumclaw worked together for several months to develop an alternative, shared animal control service model. The model called for a four-city interlocal agreement with a lead city that would hire an animal-control officer and licensing specialist and contract with a non-profit shelter. The cities were on the verge of implementing the alternative until they were able to negotiate a more favorable contract with RASKC at the last minute.

Lessons Learned

The single most important lesson learned from this partnership program is that maintaining good working relationships with neighboring cities lends itself well to fostering collaboration and partnerships. Due to the success of this partnership program, Covington and Maple Valley are exploring partnering on additional elements like joint maintenance crew training, playground equipment inspection, a sand and saline solution joint contract, a regional police approach, joint purchasing for parks, and a joint recreation plan.

The program has also helped us to realize these additional lessons:

- Pooling resources and developing coordinated efforts goes much further in the legislative grant arena than going it alone.
- Joining teams with differing expertise broadens everyone's knowledge.
- Good people make good teams, no matter the organizational boundaries.

In addition to this Covington-Maple Valley partnership, other communities have also witnessed the program's success. The city of Black Diamond has already contracted for Covington to provide building official and code enforcement services on a part time basis until the demand increases enough for them to hire their own staff. This results in a cost savings for Black Diamond and a source of revenue for Covington. Other entities are also interested in partnerships to include fleet operations, emergency management and traffic signal maintenance.