

Raising the bar on accountability, transparency and citizen engagement

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Today's Approach

- Broad strokes
- Steps we've taken
- Success and challenges
- Takeaways

But first...

Small city, big ideas!





Quick Facts

- Incorporated 1995
- Population 14,500
- Provides conventional core services
- Non-conventional service: electric utility with wind farm (7000 customers)
- Operating budget : \$49 m
- Capital budget : \$8m to \$10m (average)

Quick facts (cont'd)

- Global recognition for energy efficiency initiatives
- Nationally-renowned multi-purpose entertainment centre (Credit Union Place)
- Most advanced electric car charging infrastructure in eastern Canada
- Thriving aerospace and health IT sectors

...and that's only scratching the surface!!



Setting the Stage

- New CAO appointed October 2013
- New council elected November 2014
- Both deepened commitment to open and transparent government
- Access to information (FOIPOP)
- National trend(s)

It's really all about communication and engagement



The Summerside experience

- New transparency and accountability policy
- Established Governance, Policy and Strategy Committee (GPS)
- Continuous improvement in financial reporting
- Procurement policy streamlining
- Code of Values
- Committee of Council structure
- Policies for network usage and capital planning
- Budget consultations

Reaping the benefits

- More open debate and discussion
- More engaged public <> less “suspicion”
- Fewer in-camera discussions
- Improved agenda management
- Better discipline, shorter meetings
- Better relations with media and other partners

But, always a work-in-progress!



Budget Consultations – the genesis

- Senior staff initiated public consultation process in fall 2013
- Some initial reluctance with Council
- Didn't want a "free-for-all"
- How was this overcome?
- Communicate ground rules

Baby steps...

- Utilized standard “format” for the consultations
- Small turnout at first session, but...
- Tremendous feedback received from residents, media, etc.
- Political capital that you just can't put a value on

Early lessons

- First time around was good experience
- Unanimous, positive feedback on taking this “baby step”
- Other communities sought to emulate
- Created much goodwill
- Heightened expectations for future (in a good way!)

Building upon our success

- Consultations in 2014 now had a community roundtable
- Opportunity for more targeted and relevant budget discussions
- Opportunity to build decision-making confidence

Challenges?

- Only so much you can do in two hours!!
- Agenda tightly managed
- Setting (and sticking to) ground rules
- “Soapbox” mentality
- Usual suspects
- Responsive but also educational

What was next?

- Generally pleased with the process in first two years
- What could we do differently?
- How could we best educate the community while keeping them engaged?

Clickers and Comedy

- City switched gears in its approach
- Presented 20 questions
- Attendees select preferred response using interactive voting technology
- Intermission hosted by local performer



Outcomes

- Final report provided to Council and public
- Key trends and responses
- Budget speech highlighted what we heard and how certain ideas were adopted as priorities
- Budget media lock-up
- Discussed key learnings

What have we learned?

- Ensure no pre-determined outcomes
- Accept unknown and embrace
- Challenge of developing questions
- How do we make people feel about participating and that their input is valued

What have we learned (cont'd)

- Do what you can with internal resources
- Simply hosting public session is not enough
- Get out in community and engage on other people's terms (eg. Farmer's Market, local high school)
- Ask, accept and report; ensure constant communication
- And....**it's not all work !!**

Future Directions

Our plan for the fall:

- Information booths across community
- Look at different places to engage
- Public session again, but possibly get Council more involved (meet the people)
- Finalize online interactive tool
- City website going through renewal

Takeaways

- Tone at top (180 degree shift)
- Use evidence to educate to fullest extent possible
- Work hard (and smart) on questions
- Always seek ways to do it better
- Never underestimate the value of public engagement
- Communicate, communicate, communicate

Questions/Comments?

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THANK YOU!!



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