

Chapter 5 Other Overarching issues

a) Productivity Improvement

Throughout our report, we have noted ways in which Central Frontenac is a well-organized and leading edge municipality for its size. One of these ways is its decision to have an Information Technology specialist on staff. Not only is the position dedicated to the set-up and maintenance of the Township's IT hardware network and software, it also updates and maintains the geographic information system and the 9-1-1 civic addressing. Less known is the fact that, by maintaining consistency in the Township's choices of hardware and software, the IT Specialist prevents the Township from selecting several stand-alone IT solutions, maintains the option of developing interactions among departments, and facilitates cross-training among staff. Furthermore, the Township has benefited from the IT Specialist's ability to analyze the business processes of the Township and find ways to use computers to speed up and improve how things are done.

If used to its fullest, this position puts Central Frontenac well ahead of similar municipalities; most have no-one on staff who both knows computers and knows municipal operations and the services. As a result many small municipalities end up:

- Retaining unnecessary laborious methods of doing things because no-one has the comfort level to give them up for computer-based methods. For example, manual paper purchase orders generate piles of paper, more record-keeping, and trips to the municipal office, unless someone has the confidence and can offer the training and trouble-shooting needed to introduce an electronic purchase order system.
- Every department moving ahead in separate silos, with the result that valuable information in one department is not available to be cross-referenced with that held in other departments. For example, Building keeps electronic records of its applications but that information cannot be electronically may not be linked to tax records or Health Unit septic system records
- Risks are taken that are not in the public interest. For example, some municipalities do not have a safe and reliable data back-up system.
- Not offering proper training so that staff can fully exploit the power of the computer. For example: Microsoft programs allow trained staff to develop short-cuts that cut out several repetitious clicks for repetitious tasks. Another example: linking information from the assessment roll and the Health Unit could help to identify areas where septic system reinspection should be targeted.
- Ignoring the potential of computers in non-traditional departments. For example, without support, Public Works is less likely to adopt one-write systems for Public Works payroll and activity accounting, or a GIS-linked road information database

- Ignoring the potential to provide valuable information to the public. For example, broadcast e-mail groups can inform many people simultaneously and economically about upcoming meetings. Websites can post valuable how-to information about the Building Code or energy conservation.

There are examples of the “Productivity Improvement” role of the IT Specialist position already... the GIS, the new electronic purchase order system, the shared firefighter training inventory, the GRIPPS road information system, the searchable central files index, and more. As valuable as these have been, there is a great deal more that could be done with computers (and staff training to use them) to make the Township’s staff more efficient and effective. In our Review, we have strongly recommended that the IT/Productivity Improvement Coordinator position be retained, indeed expanded. We also recommend that the Township train back-up expertise among its existing staff for the more routine aspects of the IT/Productivity Improvement Coordinator position - GIS updating and 9-1-1 civic addressing. The Township cannot afford to let these get out of date.

We also recommend that the IT/Productivity Improvement Coordinator, with input from the CAO/Clerk and department heads, should prepare a multi-year plan for IT initiatives. This position can make other staff more efficient and better able to keep up with growing workloads.

Recommendations:

- **The IT/Productivity Improvement Coordinator should train other staff as back-up for the more routine of his functions and integrate those functions as much as possible with routine business operations.**
- **In cooperation with the CAO/Clerk and department heads, the IT/Productivity Improvement Coordinator should develop and present to Council a multi-year plan for IT initiatives to improve the efficiency and security of operations, improve service and expand the information available to the public.**

b) Long-range Capital Planning and Asset Management

Throughout our report, we have noted the importance of long-range capital asset repair/renovation/replacement planning by Council, with input from the senior staff and Recreation Committees, and with a viable financial plan to accompany it.

We suggest that this long-range planning should encompass at least 20 years, with at least the next 4 years as specific as possible. For example, with staff and consulting engineer input, the Township can estimate the average annual spending needed over the next 20 years to keep its bridges functional and safe. Then Council and Treasurer will have to devise a plan to provide that much money every year for bridge repair and replacement. Finally, the plan should be elaborated at a level of detail which itemizes the bridges that should be repaired

over the next 4 years. Then a more specific financing plan should be developed (for example, fix one bridge each year or four bridges in year one but paid for over the four years).

We are confident that this form of decision-making will avoid some conflict on Council and with staff. More discussion will be about the criteria for how to select and define projects, rather than who can get how much in each ward. It also reassures the public that the Township is aware of their issues, has considered them objectively and will deal with any reasonable need as soon as it can afford to over the next 20 years.

Long-range planning also permits Council to ask fundamental questions:

- Do we need to replace this bridge or can residents take another way around?
- Are we better to reconstruct a kilometre of road once in 40 years or re-pave 8 kilometres of road 5 times in 40 years?
- Is the community centre getting enough use to justify the cost of a new furnace and a new roof? Is it in the right location? Is utilization going up or down?
- Can we afford to upgrade our assets, or only to keep in good repair what we have?

For the first time in 2009, a full assessment of the annual depreciation of the Township's assets will be required by accounting standards. The Township is well advanced in its inventory and condition assessment of its assets. It could be a short step from there to estimating the future repair/replacement cost of those assets, determining the average annual funding required to enable the assets to serve their current purpose in the future, compare that with the Township's past average annual capital funding, and then ask the fundamental questions in the context of a long-range capital plan for the repair/renovation/replacement of assets.

Once completed, the plan would be reviewed every four years with each new Council and a specific four-year plan developed within the long-range plan. Each year's annual budget becomes easier - report on the progress of the plan, tinker with the plan based on new information, and implement.

Recommendation:

- **The Township should use the 2009 PSAB depreciation accounting requirement as the opportunity to prepare and adopt a long-range capital asset repair and replacement plan, including a financing plan and reserve funding.**

c) Department Service Plans and Performance Measures

We encourage each department to prepare and submit for Council discussion a multi-year (3 or 4 years) service plan. This does not need to be complicated. Its real purpose is to talk about the range, level and volume of service that the department proposes to provide or

expects to face. It should contain some discussion about the factors which will affect the range, level and volume of services over the next few years (legislation, demographics, development, etc.) Then, it should describe the services and service levels that it recommends, and an estimate of the resources needed to deliver. Finally it should contain measures and milestones, which the department will use to tell whether its predictions are coming true and whether its objectives are being met.

The key aspect of these service plans is to talk about results, not about activities. For example, Public Works would focus on the how well it met the level of service adopted by Council. Success could be: “we got our ploughs out whenever the snow reached 6 centimetres, as per Council policy”; it would not be: “we ploughed 42 times”. To the public, the service is not a matter of ploughing as much as you can; it is a matter of keeping snow depth down. In Planning, success could be: “we processed 90% of our applications within 90 days of receipt”; it would not be “we went to 42 meetings”.

The service plan would be reflected in the annual budget (i.e. the resources requested to fulfill the service plan). However, Council obviously retains the option in each budget to change the type or amount of service it is willing to pay for.

Accompanying every budget should be a short annual report from the department. The annual report should report **results** in terms of meaningful performance measures:

- What progress was made on the service plan?
- Were service levels maintained?
- What new services were offered? .

In order to have meaningful performance measures, Council may want to compare Central Frontenac with a set of comparable municipalities. We would suggest that the Township use the set of 9 municipalities in our survey. Performance measures are the pact that Council makes with staff: “talk to us about results; what services did you provide and how well, compared to what you set out to do. If we can judge the service that the public is receiving, we don’t have to get into operational detail”. Staff’s part is to be accountable: “ thanks for the resources and authority you delegated to us. Here is the information you need to judge whether we did what you wanted and what we said we would do.”

Recommendation

- **Council should direct each department to prepare and submit for Council’s adoption a multi-year service plan, focusing on the results that the public can expect and including measures and milestones that will be used to monitor the department’s progress.**
- **Each department should submit an annual report to Council reporting on its progress.**

d) Customer Service Requests

When a community sets service expectations for itself (in policy), everyone has a role in ensuring that the service is delivered. Successful service organizations are clear about the services they offer, and “invite” customers to assist in identifying occurrences of non performance. Top-quality customer service can be delivered, regardless of the actual levels of service offered.

Customers are getting better service when staff can respond this way,

BEST “ Thanks for noticing our service.”

SECOND BEST..... “Thanks for asking, we are aware of it and have plans to deal with it”.

THIRD BEST “ Appreciate the call, We missed that but we’re on it. Let us know if it is not addressed in time.”

It is appropriate for an individual Councillor to help to ensure that the customer receives the attention that constitutes good customer service. It is the role of Council policy - Council as a whole - to determine when and if any service or service level is warranted. It is not the role of a Councillor to decide if a service is warranted.

There are 4 basic stages in a good customer service process. These should become “culture” in the organization through training and accountability processes.

Stage 1. Inviting the Service Request (SR)

Every customer is entitled to request municipal service, or an explanation of services offered. Customers are also entitled to be treated in a respectful, consistent and timely manner. The various methods of presenting a “service request or inquiry” need to be clearly advertised. The “hot line” method, for example, should be available for all service requests - not just Public Works, and be picked up in regular office hours. Emergencies of any nature should be processed through 911, which would contact the Public Works “on call” person if the situation requires.

All requests should flow to a customer service representative who

- records the information
- enters it into the system
- makes “voice contact” with the customer within the same business day if requested, and
- forwards it to the relevant department service representative.

All management and “inside” employees should be considered customer service representatives.

Stage 2. Assessing the Service Request

The department service representative makes an assessment of the request. All requests should have

- Voice contact with customer within same business day.
- A verbal assessment reported within 5 days, to a verbal inquiry.
- A written assessment reported within 2 weeks, to a written inquiry.
- Record of the communication, assessment and course of action entered in the system.

All management staff should be considered department service representatives.

Stage 3. Service Request as a “Work Order”

If the assessment concludes that action should be taken, the “Service Request” becomes a “Work Order” when the department service representative determines that it is,

- warranted
- authorized
- funded, and
- scheduled

The work order directs the priorities of the department.

Stage 4. Closing the Service Request

Upon completion of the work, the department service representative

- communicates with the customer, if requested, that the service is restored (or delivered), and
- completes the record in the system accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *A corporate wide “Service Request” Process be developed and adopted.*
- *Staff receive training in customer service, including the service request process*

Proposed Customer Service Request(SR) Process

