RPGA (Rhineland, Plum Coulee, Gretna, Altona) Development Plan

A Plan for the Communities

In 2010, the newly formed Rhineland, Plum Coulee, Gretna and Altona (RPGA) Planning District of south central Manitoba had one thing in mind; to create a development plan that truly reflected their four communities.

Two years later, the RPGA Development Plan: Working Across Boundaries 2012-2040 was complete. The plan reflects the culture, lifestyles and ambitions of the RPGA region – in language that makes sense to those living in the area.

Shared Direction

A development plan spells out the basic rules and regulations for ongoing, future development. Once in place – and approved by the Province of Manitoba – communities use development plans to manage change and growth as they see fit.

The RPGA plan depicts a thriving agricultural region with opportunities for expansion. This growth brings challenges to deliver needed services and manage the diverse needs of the population. Through a multi-faceted engagement process, the Planning District harnessed the strengths of the municipal partners and successfully moved forward.

Some Challenges

It can be difficult to maintain momentum in a multi-year planning process, says Michael Rempel, Rhineland Chief Administrative Officer. How the Planning District was first established helped to address this challenge; the four councils began with a feasibility study to explore the creation of a Planning District and held numerous meetings with all four councils and potential Planning District Council members. This ensured there was a clear understanding of goals, issues and interests, and helped to build a foundation for plan development.

According to Don Wiebe, Rhineland Reeve and RPGA Planning District Chair, one main challenge was finding a balance between growth and preserving the agricultural and town heritage. For instance, the region’s expanding population and ensuing development was challenged by a provincial policy that protects important agricultural land.

In response, the RPGA plan established innovative categories for land use that accommodate the various modes of living and working in the region. The plan uniquely defines “country”, “village” and “town” living in the region, and explains how a full range of land uses can support these distinct ways of living.

“In the end, we have a plan that allows the rural area to balance with the urban centres”, says Wiebe.

Thank you to Don Wiebe, RPGA Board Chair, Mike Rempel, Rhineland CAO, and Jackie East and Stephen Walker with Dillon Consulting for sharing experiences and lessons learned.

For more information, please visit: http://www.rpgaplanndistrict.com/

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LESSONS LEARNED

Engage stakeholders early in a planning process to ensure timely input. Tasked with developing the plan, Winnipeg-based Dillon Consulting took a novel approach. They gathered provincial representatives to discuss the RPGA plan at the outset of the planning process. This got provincial representatives talking about the unique nature of the RPGA area and how to create a plan that made sense for the region.

It is important to create a plan that speaks to the people of the community. The Planning District built a plan with language that captures the culture and lifestyles of the region.

“Language is so important,” says Jaquie East, a planner with Dillon Consulting who guided the RPGA through the planning process. “To honestly serve a community, [planners] have to find the language.”

“This stuff is readable”
– Don Wiebe

The Planning District chose terms used by residents of the area. Just as the categories for land use reflect how community members live in the region, the title Working across Boundaries signalled the comprehensive approach embraced by all member councils of the Planning District.

In Wiebe’s words, the fact that “this stuff is readable” is critical to getting the community to truly own the plan. The result, says East, is a plan built by the community, for the community.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Involve partners in planning early and often.
- Use language that makes sense for the community you are speaking about and with.
- Stay with “active” language as much as possible – avoid conventional terms or jargon when they don’t make sense!
- Create spaces where conversations can happen (meet at local halls or community events).
- Enlist different media to connect, inform and gather input (print, broadcast, web).

Create opportunities to connect with communities, and use different media to both inform and collect input. The RPGA Planning District is made up of four communities. This poses some challenges when trying to deliver a consistent message when meeting in different locales.

The Planning District found different ways to share news and gather input about their planning process. They met often in the various settings to connect with residents, and at a range of times throughout the day and year to allow residents from different walks of life to take part.

The Planning District contacted local print and broadcast media when they were holding public meetings. They also set up a dedicated website that had information, updates and polls (www.rpgaplanningdistrict.com).