

Wege Small Cities Sustainability Best Practices Award

Collingwood, located approximately 150 km north of Toronto on the south shore of Georgian Bay and with a population of approximately 22,000, developed and released a sustainable community plan in 2008 which makes the following commitment to sustainability:

“Collingwood is a town blessed by stunning natural amenities that has active and involved residents and staff. We protect our natural environment; contribute to a diverse and vibrant economy; and act in ways that enhance our community’s overall health and well-being through a social framework that encompasses the arts, culture, heritage and recreation”.

These guiding principles have been the maxim for Collingwood Public Utilities (CPU) for more than 100 years as it provides safe, clean water to the town’s citizens and industries. More recently it supplies water for a regional pipeline that services communities within the same sub-watershed to the south of the Town of Collingwood. Over the years, Collingwood Public Utilities has developed a reputation for going beyond minimum requirements, to ensure that decisions made or steps taken will benefit all parties involved. As examples, the water treatment plant, which was the first submerged membrane surface water treatment plant in North America, is registered ISO 14001; a recent regulatory inspection rated Collingwood’s Drinking Water System at 100%; a high efficiency and an ultra-low flush toilet rebate program will be launched in July 2009 to reinforce the goals already surpassed by CPU as part of the GLSLCI Water Conservation Framework.

The following illustrates the success of this conservation program: in 2002 there were 6,868 residential connections that utilized 1450.173 ML or an average of 231L/c/d; in 2008 there were 8,245 residential connections that used 1312.668 ML or an average of 174L/c/d a reduction of more than 24%. Even if the wet weather in 2008 is taken into account the reduction in use is outstanding. It is our belief that the reason for this success is due mainly to the development and adoption of a sustainable full-cost water and wastewater rate structure in 2004. Although the water rate has always been based on true cost, the rate for wastewater somewhat under-recovered as it did not include for recapitalization. Therefore, by increasing the wastewater rate to include recapitalization and setting the rate to correspond to water meter consumption levels there is increased motivation for conservation.

It is in the area of metering and billing that we are nominating a project for your consideration for a grant award. Collingwood’s water system has been 100% metered for close to 20 years. An unaccounted water loss for the system of only 8.1% indicates that the meters are relatively accurate in spite of their age. However, there are benefits to be gained by replacing some of the older units. The project submitted for grant consideration proposes replacement of approximately 50 older and harder to read units with new meters that will have the capability of hourly reads. In addition to testing the old meters to determine the average meter accuracy it is hoped that other intangible benefits to hourly meter reads will be ascertained. These may include leak detection, backflow determination and warning and the possibility of adopting a time of use billing system, which in it self may again enhance conservation and reduce peak energy consumption.