



GETTING STARTED TOGETHER: FIRST STEPS IN ASSET MANAGEMENT

Case Study: Introductory Asset Management Capacity Building Cohort

INTRODUCTION

From November 2022 to February 2024, 11 municipalities across Alberta participated in the Introductory Asset Management Capacity Building Cohort, a part of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Municipal Asset Management Program (MAMP): Partners' Program.

Driven by the partnership of Alberta Municipalities (ABMunis), Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) and Infrastructure Asset Management Alberta (IAMA), this cohort focused on building knowledge of asset management fundamentals, developing a draft asset management policy, strategy, and team terms of reference, and practicing skills in communicating about asset management.

This program supported two cohorts of participants, generally grouped by their location in Northern and Southern Alberta. Participating municipalities shared an interest in getting started or reinvigorating their approach to asset management.

A series of three workshops facilitated by Urban Systems' team of asset management experts provided a platform for municipalities to connect, learn, and mentor one another, as well as spend dedicated time developing their unique approach to asset management.

OUR JOURNEY

The journey toward enhancing asset management capabilities often begins with a recognition of the need for improvement. For Paul Clyburn and Warren Griffin of the Village of Boyle, and Michael Coy, Mir Ali, and Larry Davidson of Birch Hills County, this realization prompted their participation in the Introductory Asset Management Capacity-Building Cohort. As Paul Clyburn noted, *"There was grant funding available, and it was an area that [we] knew [we] needed to work on."*

Larry Davidson echoed this sentiment, stating that on behalf of Birch Hills County, he'd *"exercised the executive decision that this needed to be done as part of [the County's] asset management learnings."*

These municipalities, like many others across Alberta, sought to bolster their asset management practices to better serve their communities.

During the cohort, both the Village of Boyle and Birch Hills County benefited from the collaborative learning environment fostered by the program. The team at the Village of Boyle appreciated the opportunity to network with peers and exchange insights on tackling common challenges, as Warren Griffin shared, *"It was good to hear from neighboring communities dealing with similar issues, or who don't but can still provide good feedback on ways to deal with them."*

This collaborative approach not only facilitated knowledge sharing but also empowered municipalities to develop practical strategies and policies. Boyle's experience exemplifies this, as they were able to refine their asset management approach through interactive workshops, culminating in tangible documents ready for presentation to council.

The team at the Village of Boyle stressed that *"if you're going to invest (dollars, resources, time) and buy in to the concept long-term, you don't want it to be just a template. You want something practical."*

Similarly, Birch Hills County found value in gaining a deeper understanding of asset management principles and processes. Larry Davidson noted, “*The cohort experience gives you the background knowledge – it won’t create the specific plan that each municipality needs, but it gives a better understanding of HOW to make the plan.*” Birch Hills County recognized the significance of contextualizing asset management concepts to their unique circumstances. This inclusive learning approach enabled municipalities to envision practical applications for asset management within their respective contexts.

Building lasting relationships proved to be another significant outcome of the cohort experience. The Village of Boyle and Birch Hills County forged connections with fellow participants, fostering an environment of ongoing support and collaboration. Paul Clyburn mentioned the importance of maintaining these relationships beyond the program, emphasizing the value of shared expertise and mutual assistance. This sense of camaraderie not only enriched the learning experience but also laid the foundation for future collaborations and knowledge exchanges among municipalities.

Birch Hills County also sent Council members to Asset Management for Elected Officials workshops, which were running concurrently with the Introductory Cohorts. While Davidson expressed initial reservations around their participation, citing a concern that it would inspire Council to reach beyond their roles in governance and into involvement in operations, he was ultimately grateful that they had participated. He shared that elected officials from Birch Hills County came away from that training with a greater understanding and appreciation for the many roles in Asset Management, which was encouraging for the team.



CONCLUSION:

Through their participation in the Introductory Asset Management Capacity-Building Cohort, both the Village of Boyle and Birch Hills County have made significant strides toward enhancing their asset management maturity. For the Village of Boyle, the cohort served as a catalyst for formalizing a robust asset management approach, culminating in the development of draft policies and strategies.

Paul Clyburn pointed out that, embedding asset management into existing operations ensures its continuity and relevance, even amidst organizational changes. Similarly, Birch Hills County gained invaluable insights into the intricacies of asset management, paving the way for ongoing refinement and implementation of their asset management approach.

As these municipalities continue their asset management journey, their experiences offer valuable lessons for others considering participation in capacity-building cohorts. The importance of open-mindedness, commitment to learning, and active participation cannot be overstated. As Michael Coy and Larry Davidson echoed, “*Asset management plans are living documents,*” underscoring the need for continuous engagement and adaptation. By embracing a collaborative and proactive approach, municipalities can effectively navigate the complexities of asset management, ultimately enhancing service delivery and community resilience.