

2020-2021 E.A. Danby Award Recipients

Named after AMCTO's inaugural President, the E.A. Danby Awards recognize and honour municipalities that have demonstrated outstanding achievement through innovation with respect to municipal management activities or practices. The E.A. Danby Awards focus on the three broad categories of municipal finance, municipal administration and the implementation of legislation, across municipalities of greater than 20,000 residents, and less than 20,000 residents. Recipients of this award have demonstrated tangible results related to the efficiency and effectiveness of the municipal corporation.

Municipalities of 20,000 or more:

The City of Guelph

Category: Municipal Finance

Project: Tax certificates online

If you've ever purchased a house, you'll know that your lawyer sometimes suggests a tax certificate. This certificate tells you if the current owner of the property owes any property taxes. Tax Certificate Online Tool (TCOL) is part of a service provided by Access Point Information Canada (APIC) and has been extensively used by municipalities in Alberta and British Columbia, but not in Ontario. With the purchase of APIC by Teranet it provided an opportunity for implementation in Ontario. The City of Guelph's Finance and IT teams worked with Teranet, Canada's leader in the delivery and transformation of statutory registry services, to automate the process of getting a tax certificate online at no cost to the City.

The result? A method of cutting through the manual process of delivering Tax Certificates – something that can now be done in a matter of seconds versus days. The city's Finance team estimated that each tax certificate request took between five to 20 minutes to complete with the average of 10 minutes to process approximately 1,700 requests a year. Currently they are seeing a 95% adoption rate – freeing up valuable staff time that can now be used for other customer service and collection of property taxes activities.

The city's new online tool is available 24/7 anywhere in the world with an internet connection. Payments for the tax certificate are made via credit card through a secure PCI compliant payment processor. This automation has reduced delivery time from days to seconds and the city is now working with other municipalities towards implementation of the same model.

The County of Renfrew

Category: Municipal Administration

Project: Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (RC-VTAC)

In response to COVID-19, healthcare leaders from across Renfrew County came together to create a solution that strengthens access to primary care and support for all residents, while reducing the demand on emergency departments and the 9-1-1 Service.

Within two weeks of the World Health Organization declaring COVID-19 a global pandemic, the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (VTAC) launched. Through VTAC, Renfrew residents who do not have a family physician or cannot access their family physician, can book a virtual physician assessment (for COVID-19 or non-COVID-19 concerns).

The centre also provides in-home assessments by a community paramedic (when needed) and operates COVID-19 drive-through testing clinics across the County. Through the Renfrew County VTAC, physicians and nurse practitioners assess and manage health concerns in multiple ways depending on the individual's needs. This includes:

- Phone appointments;
- Video appointments;
- In-home assessments and diagnostic testing by community paramedics;
- Remote monitoring and alerting and if necessary, escalation to a designated team of physicians and allied health professionals for the management of patients with COVID-19;
- Referral to other services including mental health support.

Since the inception of VTAC, almost 27,000 assessments have been completed by family physicians, nurse practitioners and/or community paramedics. VTAC is providing equitable access to care for all and ensuring the Emergency Departments and 9-1-1 services are reserved for true genuine emergencies. In addition, Renfrew County VTAC has conducted more than 46,000 COVID-19 tests to date via its drive-through test sites and in-home assessments by community paramedics.

The City of Ottawa with Cities of Cambridge, Windsor and the Town of Pelham

Category: Implementation of Legislation

Project: 2020 By-Elections

The Town of Pelham and the Cities of Cambridge, Ottawa, and Windsor were among the first municipalities in Canada to administer by-elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. Facing similar difficulties, these municipalities came together to create an Election Working Group. Through weekly meetings and brainstorming sessions, these municipalities redesigned the way they conducted elections. Existing procedures were adapted, and new processes were created to allow each municipality to successfully administer by-elections that adhered to the *Municipal Elections Act* and public health guidelines. These municipalities have become leaders in this area, and they have shared their processes with municipalities across Ontario.

How did they do it?

Ottawa and Pelham piloted a special mail-in ballot and on-demand special ballot voting method which allowed electors to receive and mark their ballots at home. Cambridge and Windsor implemented curbside voting at their voting locations and created a drive-through experience where electors were able to stay in their cars to vote. These projects were successful and provided electors with the option to choose their preferred method of voting based on convenience and their comfort level during the pandemic.

Developing these new processes forced the municipalities to look at their typical election processes and determine if and how these new innovations could be implemented in future elections and on city-wide scales. The procedures created by the municipalities in the Election Working Group can be applied to elections in other municipalities both during and/or after the pandemic. A notable feature was offering alternative methods of voting to all eligible electors. The municipalities in the group vary in size and population, and each municipality developed their respective alternative voting method processes to suit the needs of their communities. The success of these projects demonstrates that the procedures surrounding alternative methods of voting can be adapted to suit the needs of many other municipalities. Finally, the benefits of having an Election Working Group cannot be overlooked, as the collaborative teamwork led to four successful by-elections.

Certificates of Merit:

The City of Vaughan

Category: Municipal Administration

Project: Winter Maintenance Artificial Intelligence System

The City of Vaughan AI winter maintenance program addresses three primary concerns: meeting service level commitments, keeping the road network safe and operating seamlessly on an increasingly tight budget. These concerns manifest themselves as four questions: when should winter maintenance treatment begin on roads; how much road salt should be applied; where should this material be applied; and at what rate should it be applied? The AI technology uses weather forecasts, data from actual road conditions and Vaughan's operating best practices to recommend the optimal maintenance treatment. Vaughan was the first municipality in Canada to use this technology. The innovation has reduced salt usage by 30% and saves 400k annually.

Before this technology, decisions were based on best estimates from seasoned professionals within the organization. The AI tool helped provide the team with more accurate weather forecasts, exact road conditions and applied established rules of practice to recommend maintenance treatments. The AI maintenance recommendations are also further informed by real-time observations to drive the best treatment decisions. This program has allowed the City of Vaughan to innovate not only through the use of better information but also through process improvement. Through the use of AI, the City is able to retain its organizational knowledge.

Since its implementation, several municipalities across Canada have followed in Vaughan's lead – including the City of Calgary. This program is also applicable to larger organizations and has been adopted by provincial road agencies such as Ontario's and Alberta's Ministries of Transportation as well as transportation service providers such as Metrolinx.

The City of Oshawa

Category: Implementation of Legislation

Project: AMPLify Compliance and Safety

The AMPLify program is a series of innovative improvements to service delivery at the City of Oshawa. AMPLify established Tiered and Escalating Administrative Monetary Penalties (A.M.P.s) and enhanced the City's appeal system by allowing appellants to conduct appeals written or virtually. A.M.P.s are an emerging approach to dealing with minor bylaw infractions in an effective and efficient manner that transfers bylaw disputes from the courtroom to the municipality through the use of City-appointed Screening and Hearings Officers who can modify, cancel, or affirm penalties. The program seeks to achieve and address three main areas: optimize City resources, increase compliance with City bylaws, and improve access to appeals.

AMPLify has optimized City Services by:

- Reducing the number of complaints Municipal Law Enforcement Officers are required to investigate - rerouting enforcement resources to other priorities;
- Increasing the service capacity of other departments such as Service Oshawa, the City's customer service centre, and by;
- Allowing Hearings Officers to conduct more appeals in a single day.

Beyond improving efficiency, AMPLify has also enhanced public health and safety by increasing voluntary compliance, and appeals are now more citizen-friendly by offering Virtual or Written Hearings.

Municipalities of 20,000 or less:

Municipality of Thames Centre

Category: Municipal Administration

Project: Municipal Modernization App

The Municipality of Thames Centre launched a market-leading municipal digital app on March 8th, 2021. In strengthening Thames Centre's strategic objective of communication and community engagement, this app allows for easy and direct communication with the municipality and its citizens - enabling effective and relevant service delivery.

The new Thames Centre app provides locations of amenities, garbage and recycling information, news and public notices, COVID-19 updates, push notifications, a business directory, links to the municipality's social media, service request portal, and more. The app directory features one-click access to call or email through a mobile device. The Places menu categorizes amenity types with contact/hours information, proximity to location, and turn-by-turn GPS enabled directions. The customer service request portal provides service request types to accept all feedback/requests. The request is directed and linked to an additional software called CityWide.

The purpose of the app is to streamline processes, engage citizens, relay important information, and ultimately simplify communication. While providing access through the palm of citizens' hands, Thames Centre is achieving engagement on a much more diverse and meaningful level.

Congratulations to all 2020-2021 E.A. Danby Award recipients!