

Impact of COVID-19 on Infrastructure Investments from an Asset Management Perspective

Host

Christina Benty, Strategic Leadership Solutions

Panel

Mayor Kelly Linton, Township of Centre Wellington

Mayor Robin Jones, Village of Westport

Mayor Ric Bresee, Loyalist Township

Summary

Host, Christina Benty led a panel discussion focused on how municipal councils can use asset management as a decision-making tool during a pandemic, reassesses investment priorities, manage risks and demonstrate sound stewardship of public resources. This webinar covers:

1. Refresher: What is asset management and why is it necessary?
2. Being Strategic: Intentional rather than accidental
3. Telling the Truth: Who do you need to be engaging with and how?

What is the role of elected officials?

“They represent their community on what those community aspirations around service levels and service delivery are. In other words, your citizens are shareholders in your community and as a result, your role is stewardship and governance over the organization that provides those services.” – Christina Benty

In order to begin the asset management process, Elected Officials must first find the answers to a series of questions:

- 1) What services does your community need and want, now and in the future?
- 2) What are the services your community is willing and able to pay for?
- 3) Are we spending enough on the infrastructure that provides those services?

How does asset management help?

It is a systematic approach to maintaining, improving or decreasing a desired level of service while balancing available funding, time constraints, prioritization, public demand and legislative requirements. Effective asset management needs to be:

- Reflected in all planning
- Entrenched in policy
- Embedded into corporate behaviour

Question One [35:30]

Share your municipality's experience with COVID and how will a post-COVID world impact your planning and budgeting as a service provider?

- **Mayor Robin Jones**

"One of the strangest things we have seen happen [due to the pandemic] is an emigration from large cities. People are taking their cottages and turning them into their permanent homes. In this municipality, there are two homes for sale. We've never had bidding wars but now people are working from home so they can work from anywhere, it doesn't have to be in any of the larger centres. So that's a pressure on one hand when you think about asset management. The level of service that is the expectation from people who have lived here for a while might be different than those people moving here."

Question Two [45:48]

Revenues are dropping and cost recovery targets are changing significantly. How are you having those important conversations?

- **Mayor Ric Bresee**

"Right now, our rates [for public facilities such as the arena] are fixed by our existing documentation. But going forward, what are those costs going to be and what do we have to set our rates at? It really is a big question of when and how are we going to reopen?"

Question Three [55:46]

How do you provide a safe environment so that staff can tell the truth about what the state of the infrastructure is?

- **Mayor Kelly Linton**

"We have a really strategic plan that is based on needs and not wants. So for us, rebuilding bridges, roads, water, those are our core services. Because we have a strategic plan, and because we are aligning our budget to that plan, it helps keep council directed and aligned. And this helps keeps us accountable to and transparent with the public."