

Town embarks on cataloging its infrastructure

Did you know the town has 43.23 kilometres of water mains?

CHRIS ZWICK
NEWS STAFF

Did you know there are 601 wastewater manholes and 216 storm water manholes located within the boundaries of the Town of Westlock?

It's true. There are also 55.33 kilometres of municipally-owned wastewater mains, 43.23 kilometres of water mains and 171 fire hydrants.

These are the kinds of things the town needs to know as the it embarks on implementing a policy on asset management, which is defined as the process of managing municipal infrastructure to ensure the delivery of

quality and fiscally-responsible services.

Town council heard a presentation on asset management from the town's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technician Beth Thola at its most recent committee of the whole meeting Feb. 20. It passed the actual policy at its regular Feb. 26 meeting.

"It's somewhat of a housekeeping item to have the policy in place and we really wanted to focus on what administratively we're actually doing," said interim CAO Simone Wiley before Thola's presentation.

Thola said asset management focuses

on each asset's life cycle and considers the maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement of all municipal infrastructure to provide sustainable service delivery while managing risks and minimizing costs.

"The best way to describe asset management is becoming proactive rather than reactive," said Thola.

"I'd like to add in to this that in the studying I've been doing, asset management starts with your design. It's right down at the engineering level when we're laying it out," she said, referring to any future developments that are scheduled for construction.

Asset management is important because municipalities are often the largest and most complex business in a town. Residents rely on the services provided by the municipality, which means sustainable services and risks need to be properly managed, said Thola.

Local governments are often asset intensive as well and most assets are long-lived and need increasing maintenance over time and eventual replacement.

"The purpose of an

asset management plan is to show the services being provided, the resources being used, the condition and the life cycle of those assets and the risks and how they are to be managed," she said, adding it allows a municipality to generate a long-term financial plan and provides a tool for discussion and balancing future options.

It also allows a municipality to see what services are really needed and what aren't.

Thola is currently in the process of building an asset management repository complete with attribute information regarding the location, size, material type, construction date and age, condition, expected useful life and replacement cost.

At this point, the water distribution networks, wastewater and storm water systems have all been accounted for, but there is still much to do.

Mayor Ralph Leriger pointed out that not every single line is being viewed — instead select lines are chosen and information is extrapolated from the age, type and condition of the line selected.



The town is currently cataloging all of its infrastructure, including this fire hydrant on 107 Street — one of 171 in the municipality.

"Surely, you can't expect to camera every line?" he asked.

"It would be wonderful if we could, but you're right," responded Thola.

"We started out wanting to camera every line," said Wiley.

"We got in the astronomical amount of money that was going to take and decided it wasn't feasible. So we've selected some problem areas, if you will, and given the direction to our consultants to start in those areas and then we'll extrapolate on that information."

Roads, sidewalks and trails still have to be counted and measured, municipally owned buildings have to be assessed along with equipment, machinery and vehicles. So do parks and sports and recreational infrastructure, along with other land, land improvements and parking lots.

Ahead of the curve

Upon passing its asset management plan on Feb. 26, the town is now ahead of the curve when it comes to the practice, according to a recent survey of municipalities by the provincial government.

Between Aug. 23 and Sept. 11, 2017 the survey was completed by

54 per cent of all the municipalities queried. There was a 53 per cent response rate from urban municipalities and a 55 per cent response rate from rural municipalities, all of whom own 56 per cent of all the municipal infrastructure in the province, said Thola.

Of them, 67 per cent said they have initiated or implemented an asset management strategy; 23 per cent have council-approved policies; and 14 per cent have formalized their strategies in an asset management plan.

Westlock is now in that 23 per cent. It is also in the 38 per cent of respondents that have a partial inventory of its assets.

"My interpretation is we are not behind. We are close to leading for municipalities of our size," said Thola.

"I know for a small municipality, I think we hit all the major categories. You need to have your leadership to be on board with it and want to drive it and you need to have dedicated people," said Wiley.

"I see this and I think, for council, this is some of the most important work we're doing as an organization. It leads into good decisions," Leriger concluded.

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