

## Intermunicipal Recreation Agreement

Location: Alberta

Topic(s): Building Intermunicipal Relationships/Collaborating on Municipal Services

Please describe the situation.

City Council was on the verge of passing a resolution which would dissolve the Joint Recreation Agreement between the Municipal District and the City.

What was the current political environment? What factors led to the situation? What were the events that unfolded in this particular scenario?

Simply put “honesty”, annexations had created a lot of mistrust. The two Councils could not see “eye to eye” on anything.

How did you respond to or address the situation?

The Joint Recreation Board had made a recommendation to City Council to build a multi-purpose Leisure Centre to meet the growing demand for recreation in a very fast-growing City. The Municipal District advised the City it would not be contributing to any capital to the Centre even though the Recreation Agreement called for them to do so. City Council directed Administration to continue negotiations while the facility was being constructed.

The facility was close to completion and negotiations stalled. City Council was prepared to pass a resolution to dissolve the Recreation Agreement. Minor Sports Associations had been advised that if Council was to pass the resolution it would mean Municipal District residents could not register their kids with the City Leagues. Municipal District residents were of course not happy with this decision nor were the Leagues. In fact, some of them claimed they would ignore the directive.

Just before the City Council meeting, where the vote would be taken to dissolve the Recreation Agreement, I requested a “one-on-one” meeting with the Municipal District CAO. He agreed and at the meeting I simply asked for the real reason the Municipal District would not honor the existing Recreation Agreement. The Municipal District CAO was relatively new to the municipality and as a result he did not have a lot of history or bias. He informed me that the Municipal District was fearful to invest a lot of money into this facility and then be in a position ten years from now wanting to build their own. I suggested we structure a new agreement whereby they could contribute capital to the facility in five-year increments, much like a time share. The life of the building would be fifty years. In five, ten, or twenty years if the Municipal District wanted to build a facility of their own they could withdraw from the capital contributions towards this facility. He felt this would address the Municipal District’s concerns. Both Councils unanimously supported the new agreement. The agreement initiated a “new attitude” between the two municipalities.

### What lessons did you learn from this scenario?

Life is all about communication and trust. By reducing the negotiations to two parties we were able to develop some trust which allowed us to fully understand the situation and therefore address it appropriately. The removal of both Councils from the negotiations allowed the CAO's to reach an agreement, that in the end allowed both Councils to be seen as working together for the betterment of both municipalities.

### What advice would you give to someone going through a similar situation?

When negotiating with what may be considered “an adversary,” it is crucial to eliminate any potential negotiators who have lots of “negative history or issues” with the other party. Keep the size of the negotiation team small, make sure they are open-minded and give them autonomy to be creative.