

Monday, November 28, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



CITY OF WELLAND IS A “SMART CITY”

The City of Welland is a “smart city” and is using advancements in digital technology to assist in delivering services, to connect and engage with residents, and to become a more sustainable community.

Being a “smart city” is an urban development vision that is transforming how communities operate and to help them manage population growth amid increasing urbanization and to enhance their competitiveness in a global economy. While there isn’t a universally agreed upon definition, the following characteristics have been used to describe a “smart city:” liveability, workability, and sustainability. Here are examples of new technologies the City of Welland has implemented as well as innovative ideas being explored by staff:

FORWARD THINKING TECHNOLOGY:

- Welland was one of the first Canadian cities to switch to LED streetlights. This technology has resulted in cost savings and energy efficiencies
- Automatic light sensor switches have been installed in City Hall offices as part of an energy incentive program between Welland Hydro and the City of Welland
- Parking enforcement staff use digital technology for parking tickets
- the Fire Department uses Tough Book mobile computers in their trucks
- Building staff use mobile devices to stay connected to the office when they’re in the field
- Information Services created an Open Data project that includes a catalogue of digital information and data sets available for download from the City’s website
- new Employee ID cards have been implemented that utilize QR-Code technology to verify that people claiming they work for the City can prove it

COMMUNICATIONS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Staff are utilizing a number of modern communication tools to reach residents, businesses and potential investors such as our Big Screen LED Board located at the Civic Square, Radio Ads, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- Utilizing drone technology for it’s potential to be used for a large number of purposes including site selection for industry and tourism and marketing initiatives.

TRANSPORTATION:

- Welland Transit has an automated stop announcement system in place that uses GPS. They are also investigating a trip planner using this technology that would assist passengers to plan trips and makes Transit more friendly and easier to use
- GPS and AVL (Automatic Vehicle Location) help Transit systems to know where vehicles are located for planning, scheduling and emergency reasons.

WHERE WE’RE HEADING:

- Finance Department will be introducing an open data initiative in 2017 for viewing budget variances and other budget data on-line
- Water meters are being updated with radio frequency heads so they can be read remotely
- Digital business cards using QR-Code technology will also be implemented

- In early 2017, the Clerk's Department will be live streaming Council meetings that will include closed captioning
- Welland Transit will be implementing electronic fare boxes and this will give valuable information on travel patterns of transit users. This information can also assist schedulers with timing of buses and putting extra buses in place when needed

Being a smart city is an initiative that supports the strategic direction and priorities of the City. To this end, staff are developing a smart city strategy and will be collaborating with other public and private sector partners and key community stakeholders. The Mayor and CAO recently attended a two day "Intelligent Cities Summit" in Toronto and the City's Communications Coordinator attended a "Think Smarter: Economic Development Forum" in Niagara Falls to develop a broader knowledge and understanding of smart city concepts and to build a network of key contacts and technology providers.

Welland's smart city initiative also complements the City's partnership with Niagara Region in support of the SWIFT (Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology) economic development initiative that has secured \$180 million in federal and provincial funding to build a fibre optic network to improve broadband connectivity. Also, as part of the liveability, workability, and sustainability elements of a smart city, there is a focus on having a coordinated and collaborative approach to transportation planning, connecting cities, and moving people and goods and services in an efficient manner. To further this goal, the City of Welland has partnered with Niagara Region, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls to improve inter-municipal transit and to develop options for the future as the Niagara prepares for GO Train service in 2021.

In addition to having smart infrastructure and using technology, part of having a smart city vision is adopting an "open government" philosophy and promoting the free sharing of information, known as "open data." The City of Welland is committed to this philosophy that promotes more citizen engagement, collaboration, and oversight which strengthens accountability of municipal staff and elected officials. The City has participated in the Public Sector Digest - Open Cities Index launched in 2015 to benchmark municipal open data initiatives in Canada.

"Our staff continue to explore and embrace digital solutions and smart city initiatives as a way of becoming more efficient, more transparent, and being more responsive to our citizens," said Chief Administrative Officer Gary Long. "It's important that we value and promote a culture of innovation throughout the organization where staff are encouraged to think creatively and strategically about new approaches and ideas."

"Being a smart and connected community is directly related to our liveability and assists us in adapting and responding to challenges and opportunities," said Welland Mayor Frank Campion. "This also enhances our competitiveness and our ability to attract new residents, jobs, and investment. We're exploring strategic investments that support our knowledge economy such as building a fibre optic network to improve broadband connectivity to ensure we have Wi-Fi in public spaces and in our downtown core."

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