



THE CITY OF WELLAND'S ROAD TO CERTIFICATION WITH ISO 37120 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES - INDICATORS FOR CITY SERVICES AND QUALITY OF LIFE

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A high quality of life. Efficient, smart, and effective services. Safe, sustainable, and healthy communities. These are all qualities every municipality strives for, and we as municipal IT professionals support these goals behind-the-scenes. But how do we know we are making a positive impact in our communities, or if we're even on the right path to reaching these goals?

ISO 37120 Sustainable cities and communities – Indicators for city services and quality of life is the first international standard that defines a framework by which cities around the world can measure their performance with respect to city services and the quality of life of their citizens. Developed by cities, for cities, it provides a platform that can be used to compare and benchmark verifiable key performance indicators with other municipalities in order to highlight areas of success, and areas that may need improvement. ISO 37120 enables a municipality to become more self-aware as a community, and ultimately can help to steer strategic initiatives to attract new business, improve healthcare, education, water/wastewater services, safety, and improve the lives of its constituents.

Welland started on the road to certification under ISO 37120 in April 2018 when it signed on with the [World Council on City Data](#) (WCCD). The WCCD is a global leader in standardized metrics, and is the organization that led the development of the standard which they are now rolling out internationally to the first 100 cities. The WCCD also administers the ISO 37120 certification system and the Global Cities Registry. However, Welland started investigating the certification program well before April 2018 when Chief Administrator Officer Gary Long and Mayor Frank Campion attended a presentation by the WCCD at the First Annual Intelligent Cities Summit in Toronto on Nov. 8-9, 2016.

The City of Welland had already adopted an “open government” philosophy and were making data available for public consumption. Long wanted to build on and expand the smart cities and open data initiatives. He saw an opportunity with the WCCD and ISO 37120 to have the data and methodologies independently verified and have Welland included in a broader community so that the city could compare and benchmark itself against other cities. He also saw the certification as a way to build on the city’s success of being recognized as a leader among major Canadian cities as “most improved” by the Public Sector Digest in their 2017 Open Cities Index. As with any ISO certification, achieving ISO 37120 requires an organization to go through a rigorous independent process and meet high standards.

The City’s GIS Coordinator was tasked with leading this project. Although not typically the responsibility of a GIS Coordinator, the ISO 37120 standard embraces the open data concept. Many municipal open data programs have been initiated by the GIS divisions for various reasons, one being the tendency for GIS to be a large data repository. More importantly, this was an opportunity to highlight the impact and value of open data from all kinds of organizations, not just municipalities. Opening up the information required for this certification could also provide benefits to these organizations by allowing them to compare their specific indicators with similar organizations in other jurisdictions, opening lines of communication between them, and helping them to evaluate and possibly improve their services.

The 100 indicators in the standard are organized into 17 different subject areas, or “themes” covering economy, education, energy, environment, finance, fire and emergency response, governance, health, recreation, safety, shelter, solid waste, telecommunications and innovation, transportation, urban planning, wastewater, and water and sanitation. Each indicator is further classified as either “supporting” or “core.”

Cities strive to report as many of the 100 indicators as possible, in conformity with the ISO definitions and methodologies, and the more indicators that are verified, the higher the certification level that can be achieved. The WCCD offers five certification levels based on the number of indicators verified by an independent, third-party verifier. These include: Aspirational, Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. Before starting the data collection, all of the indicators were examined from a Welland perspective and classified using the following: “obtainable,” “most likely obtainable,” “further investigation required,” and

“unknown/not obtainable.” These classifications were based on knowledge of the availability of the information for Welland, and on responses to questions posed to internal staff and personnel at other agencies. The WCCD provided a document that outlined the common sources of information for other municipalities, and the recommended sources for Welland in particular. At the end of this discovery exercise, it was determined that Welland could strive for the Platinum level certification with the WCCD, meaning the city would report at least 90 of the total 100 indicators in ISO 37120.

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A cross-departmental approach was taken for this project, with a team of expert municipal staff from the divisions that would have the most knowledge of the various subject areas. After an education session and kick-off meeting, each staff representative was assigned indicators that were relevant to their expertise or job function to research and obtain. The standard dictates the methodology by which each indicator must be obtained, so the team was given guidelines on how to collect and document the information based on the ISO standard. Because the ISO document itself is a licensed product (one licence per user) it was important from a budgeting perspective to keep in mind how many staff team members were required, and how many licences had to be purchased.

The intent of the certification program is to submit updated information annually, so the data collection team was required to seek out and obtain the most recent verifiable information available. Part of the WCCD process involves a third-party independent verifier that validates and confirms all of the information and supporting documentation submitted. Certification candidates are required to submit source documentation for each indicator through the WCCD online workbook system. If the source is Statistics Canada information, a screen capture of the relevant table and data element used for the indicator must be submitted. If the source is an email from personnel at an external organization such as a school board or health department, the email must be included. When one begins to drill down into the various indicators and ISO methodology, these tasks can seem quite daunting. However, it is the independent verification of the information that gives this standard value and significance on a global scale. When comparing indicators among cities we can be assured that the information is valid, has meaning, and is truly comparable.

Several organizations and agencies were consulted along Welland's road to certification including Niagara Region, Niagara Regional Police Service, Canadian Mental Health Association, the four school boards (District School Board of Niagara, Niagara Catholic District School board, Conseil scolaire Viamonde, Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir), Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, Statistics Canada, Province of Ontario, and OAG to name a few. For some of these organizations, the information was readily available either from staff directly, through open data web sites, or other online sources. For others this process was more challenging - the information was not readily available or had to be compiled from multiple or more obscure sources. Some organizations required freedom of information requests and/or fees to extract, package, and deliver the data. This highlighted how important it was to be very clear and specific when asking for the information and for the data to be opened up at these non-municipal organizations.

Long sees the WCCD ISO 37120 certification as a tool for continuous improvement for how Welland delivers programs and services. In addition, there is an opportunity to use this data to help the city develop potential solutions or options for the issues and challenges it faces. It also supports the economic development and growth management strategy. The municipality can benefit from this endeavour by attracting business, and increasing awareness of potential problem areas. Internal city staff have become more data-aware and are beginning to see the value of open data, much of which they themselves generate, collect, and work with behind the scenes every day. This awareness, when put into practice, can lead to greater efficiencies in the front-line services they deliver. Using the data we collect and have at our fingertips can unlock the information needed to make the decisions that will improve the lives of the people living in our communities. Through the indicators contained in the ISO 37120 standard and the WCCD certification process, any municipality can identify specific city services for improvement, and open up communication with other municipalities to share strategies and insights. This certification can also help municipalities engage the service providers at other levels of government - regional, provincial, or federal - to assist with the improvement of services at those levels that have an impact on the local community.

On Sept. 26, 2018, [Welland received Platinum level certification](#) under ISO 37120 with the WCCD.

The City of Welland, covering 81 square kilometres, is located in the heart of the Niagara Peninsula, south of Lake Ontario and North of Lake Erie. With a population of more than 50,000, the city has been shaped by the rich history of the Welland Canals, the major shipping routes linking Lake Erie with Lake Ontario, its industrial legacy, being home to some of Canada's largest and most famous industrial companies, and a rich multi-cultural heritage.