Strathcona County Uses IMAGINiT's Technical Writing Team to Publish 'Smart' Design and Construction Standards

Introduction

Set in the center of Alberta's energy and agricultural heartland, **Strathcona County** is a thriving, successful and vibrant community made up of both rural and more densely populated urban areas.

The Challenge

Strathcona County received feedback from internal and external construction and project managers regarding the diverse state of their existing *Design and Construction Standards* documentation. From water utilities to roads and transportation guidelines, the County had four different books of standards, including unique standards for its rural and urban areas. There was growing concern that different documents included information for the same standard but were not consistent. It was difficult for both staff and contractors to navigate the many layers of information, which led to confusion regarding which version of a standard was "correct," and simple questions sometimes required several individuals for a response.

The County's *Design and Construction Standards*—which guide contractors and project managers when building Municipal Utility, Transportation & Open Space Infrastructure—required a complete overhaul and modernization.

"Our engineering standards documentation had grown organically over the years," explains Jason Eggen, C.E.T., Senior Engineering Technologist and CAD Manager for Strathcona County. "We needed to take a serious look at how to eliminate redundancies, update the standards and make it easier for our many stakeholders to find the information required to operate in compliance."

The Solution

The County looked for outside technical documentation expertise to offer a solution of how to present the information in an easy-to-use, consolidated format. At a meeting with his IMAGINiT Technologies account executive, Jason addressed the need to update the county's construction standards. IMAGINiT recommended its technical writing division, **ASCENT**, well known as an industry leader in training and courseware development for CAD software.

Strathcona contracted ASCENT to create a smart, single-source, easy-to-use *Design and Construction Standards* document. This 'smart' document consolidates all the standards documents into one, incorporating links from a table of contents and links within the standards documents to reference drawings and tables.

The companies held regular status meetings to ensure that action items were documented and timelines were met for the County's technical review team and for council meetings, where progress was regularly reported until the project was completed.

The Results

Strathcona County's Council adopted the new *Design and Construction Standards* document system and has since experienced the following benefits:

1. **Fast Access to Design Standards and Drawings Eliminates Staff Time and Improves Contractor Relations**
   ASCENT created a directory structure to help users easily access documents with just a few mouse clicks. "The time we spent on the front end to update our standards will save many people hundreds of hours down the road," said Eggen.

2. **Consolidation Eliminates Redundant and Obsolete Standards**
   Because all standards are now located in the single-source PDF, Strathcona County only needs to make updates in one place, eliminating redundancies and making County operations more efficient. "When I show contractors our new system, they say they wish other municipalities would adopt the same idea to communicate their standards," said Eggen.

3. **Smarter Standards Mean Smarter Processes**
   The interactive forms embedded within the consolidated standards document make it easy for designers and contractors to reference the standards and drawing details, and the new system facilitates the process for users to interact directly with the County.

Strathcona County's *Design and Construction Standards* document makes them one of the leading municipalities in Canada in communicating this information to stakeholders. By streamlining and consolidating their design standards, they are able to provide construction contractors and design consultants with quick and easy access to accurate standards and drawing information. Eliminating duplicate and obsolete standards will save the County and stakeholders hundreds of hours of time.

"Technology is making life easier for people. If you don't use it to your advantage, you'll just be left behind. ASCENT's technical writers showed high levels of expertise in information architecture and design," said Eggen. "They were flexible and supportive, formulated numerous creative solutions, and showed us how we could use the technology to improve communications and efficiencies at every step. Working with the IMAGINiT and ASCENT team took us leaps and bounds ahead of any other municipal jurisdiction we can find. Their ability to respond to the challenge was remarkable."

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