

# Lawrence Shares Services and Equipment



By Mark W. Holmes  
Mayor, Lawrence Township (Mercer)



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**S**haring services and municipal equipment has become part of our culture in Lawrence Township over the last decade. Sharing Public Works equipment with neighboring municipalities has been engrained in our annual budget process and we are currently soaring towards the million-dollar mark in equipment procurements with Princeton Borough and Princeton Township. Our efforts began with a simple project of finding an efficient way to store and process our yard waste and leaves. The township collaborated with the two Princeton's and our partnership has forged the construction, operation and sharing of a large Ecological Facility in Lawrence Township, and has expanded these services to other phases of Public Works operations.

Our Ecological site was jointly constructed with crews from all three municipalities, and equipment was jointly purchased to operate the facility (tub grinder, leaf turner, front-end loaders, screener, and miscellaneous compost equipment.) This site is currently a NJDEP class "B" and "C" facility that collects and processes over 35,000 cubic yards of brush and tree parts on an annual basis. This site also processes 22,000 cubic yards of leaves from the three municipalities and school boards, and disseminates the compost free of charge to our residents.

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Our site continues to process leaves and brush for the three municipalities and saves valuable space at our landfills. Our recycled brush saved approximately 2,581 tons of material from a landfill destination, and leaves saved approximately 7,643 tons. With skyrocketing disposal costs, that translates into over a million dollars worth of disposal savings for our combined municipalities. To visually gain a perspective of this savings, the brush could realistically cover a football field 9' high, and the leaves could blanket the field at 7' of material.

Because of our joint efforts, we continue to offer the recycled material to our residents for free, and sell the remainder to local contractors' which assist us with operating costs. Once the finished product is removed by the residents or sold to the contractors, we are then able to efficiently deposit additional raw material without disruption.

Another benefit of our shared Ecological site is that it allows for the recycled material to be used in our municipal parks, playgrounds, landscape, and respective school systems. Last year, our Ecological Facility sold approximately \$90,000 worth of double-ground wood chips and leaf mulch to contractors. The sale of our superfluous material creates a reliable funding stream for parts, fuel, rentals and our annual DEP permit. The team-work and willing labor participation that is exhibited from all three municipalities is the key ingredient to our success. We could not operate such an efficient and productive site without sharing the burden of labor and equipment costs with our neighbors.

Our Ecological Facility endeavor created additional opportunities between the three municipalities for additional shared services. We soon purchased asphalt-paving equipment with Princeton Township and began the process of overlaying secondary municipal roadways. Each year we work very closely together with regard to scheduling, equipment maintenance, and long term planning.

Both municipalities work diligently to accommodate paving schedules and priorities. This equipment and agreement allows us to maintain our public infrastructure while making use of a valuable funding source for projects that are beyond the scope of Public Works employees. We assist with labor and share all repair costs for the machinery and transportation vehicles. Most of our preventive maintenance work can be achieved during the off-season when schedules can be accommodated. Since 1998, our public works department has installed over 45,000 tons of asphalt.

Other shared items that have been procured include, Infrared Pavement Restoration System, Diesel Emission Testing Equipment, used Mack Truck Tractor, and Anti-Icing Equipment. The new stormwater regulations have required each municipality to inspect and clean each catch basin annually. With over 2,000 storm drains in Lawrence Township alone, we partnered with Princeton Borough for our 2008 capital budget to share a \$200,000 Jet Truck to service

both municipalities' needs. With this latest initiative, Lawrence Township will save approximately \$500,000 dollars in equipment acquisitions since our inception.

Obviously, equipment needs vary from town to town, and not all equipment is suitable for this program. We ask very simple questions with regard to our assessment. These include:

1. Do we need this equipment at the same time of the year?
2. Can we maintain and store the item?
3. Life expectancy?
4. Operational and maintenance costs?

Most items can be shared in some fashion. Participants need to work carefully and be flexible in all aspects of the process.

We are proud that our sharing of services and municipal equipment has served us well up to this point, and we will strive to continue our efforts to become even more efficient, while still maintaining and providing our residents with the quality services that they deserve. ▲

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# Moving Out Your Records for Greater Efficiency

**M**unicipalities are responsible for the increasingly overwhelming task of managing town records. As if keeping track of old and new documents for city health, education, tax, police and other departments were not enough, local governments are also responsible for protecting the personal information of its residents in a time of hackers and identity theft. Overcrowded storage rooms, collapsing stacks of file boxes and long waits for document retrieval have become commonplace. In the Borough of North Arlington one man decided to do something about it. Business Administrator and Municipal Clerk Terence M. Wall found an alternative way to modernize the system and increase efficiencies.

The first step toward corrective action was admitting there was a problem. Wall explained how there were, "boxes and files in many areas of the building with a serious need for organization and protection." He knew that boxed files sitting throughout offices were a thing of the past and better organizational technologies existed. But, he admitted, improving operations was not the

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only concern, security was a major consideration. He visited several different record storage facilities and located what he believes to be the most comprehensive and secure service in Oakland.

FileBank, an off-site data security service, offered the Borough of North Arlington the answer to their record storage. The company sent representatives to pack, label and move documents into new archive boxes. The professional storage boxes were bar-coded, added into their system and delivered to the company's archive center in

Oakland. Inactive files were then inventoried and archived, semi-active files were stored in the same manner or converted to an electronic file cabinet along with current files so they could be easily accessed by the appropriate Borough departments.

Under the new security arrangements, records would be kept in a climate controlled vault with 24/7 monitoring and motion sensing equipment. Access to the stored data over the internet is user and password protected with 128 bit encryption. As a back-up, all paper originals were also catalogued and archived. The company also identified obsolete documents and requested destruction from NJDARM and provided certified destruction after approvals.

Following the move, borough officials had a new sense of relief that all the data critical to operations were safe from fires, flooding, power failure, theft or unauthorized access. In a short time, the result of Terence M. Wall's effort to move to an off-site document service began to pay off. Employees started to

have more time to focus on specific tasks rather than spend a lot of time searching for paperwork. There was also noticeably less clutter around the building. "Ease of access and better organization means greater operational efficiency and a more productive work environment," Wall said, "This also reduces costs."

Other advantages to an off-site location make it possible for any authorized person to access borough records from anywhere in the world using the internet. This could have its advantages for people working at home or traveling. If local officials wanted to travel with a wireless card in their laptop, they could virtually have their office at their fingertips. But remember, the service does not entirely rule out keeping required paperwork on hand.

Potential drawbacks could be access to information in an emergency where internet or phone service is interrupted. Municipalities should also remember that they can not have enough redundancy. Regardless of how secure your off-

site data facility may seem, it may be a good thing to consider who is backing up their facility as redundant protection to your critical information. There is secure and then there is safe and secure.

Is off-site data management the way of the future for municipal governments? in Walls opinion, "It should be considered because the retention of government records is not only the law, it is truly important." As Business Administrator and Municipal Clerk for the Borough of North Arlington, he thought it was important enough to locate a service provider, move all the borough's documents and give it a try. It seems to be working for them.

There are a number of off-site data storage facilities who can manage records for a municipal operation. Take the Terrance M. Wall approach and arrange to visit them. Finding one that will work well with your municipal operations will only cost a little effort in the short term but the gains can be well worth it. ▲

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