

Lawrence Shares Services and Equipment



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



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Sharing 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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