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## Dublin: Ohio's Most Intelligent Community

BY PSD RESEARCH

Within the last two years, the city of Dublin Ohio celebrated its bicentennial, was named one of the seven most Intelligent Communities in the World—two years running—and opened a brand new state of the art entrepreneurial center to attract businesses from around the world. Sitting just to the northwest of the city of Colum-

bus, Dublin's population has grown from 681 residents in 1970 to an estimated 41,093 residents in 2010. PSD spoke with Dublin's Senior Project Manager, Sara Ott, about what makes this municipality so innovative.

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## I. FINANCE

### **HOW HAS DUBLIN FARED DURING THE RECENT RECESSION AND SLOW ECONOMIC RECOVERY?**

We're doing reasonably well, given the circumstances. Our construction activity is definitely down. We're not issuing nearly the number of building permits, particularly for residential properties, as we have been. We've seen a drastic drop in our commercial construction as well. But we took some steps early on when we realized this recession was coming to help insulate the city financially. In 2009, we did voluntary budget reductions in the city and we also started freezing some vacancies and really scrutinizing whether we should fill them or not. Because of that prudence, we are in a fairly safe situation now. We maintain a very healthy general fund balance and we've been able to actually grow that in the last few years.

### **THE CITY OF DUBLIN COLLECTS A 2% LOCAL INCOME TAX. WHY LEVY AN INCOME TAX AT THE LOCAL LEVEL?**

It's actually programmed in state statute in Ohio that municipalities, generally speaking, are able to levy a local income tax. And what's unique about Ohio is that it can be charged for where you work as well as where you live. You will typically see it more often for where you work and then some kind of credit from a local municipality is given depending on where you live. So Dublin has collected this 2 percent income tax for decades now and it has been the primary revenue source for the city. Seventy-nine per cent of our operating revenues come from our income tax sources. We import a lot of labour every day.

### **DO YOU NOT HAVE A LOCAL PROPERTY TAX IN DUBLIN?**

We have a very small property tax. The city collects less than two million dollars in property tax. We currently have that dedicated to park land acquisition and capital improvements. But we rely heavily on the income tax to finance our services.

### **DOES EACH MUNICIPALITY IN OHIO GET TO DECIDE WHETHER TO COLLECT A LOCAL INCOME TAX?**

The voters of each municipality have to approve it. The actual rate varies from municipality to municipality, usually somewhere between 1.75 percent and 2.5 per cent. The county collects sales tax and most of our school districts in Ohio are funded through property tax, with some adding on an income tax to that as well. It's a different beast here from most other places.

### **IS YOUR LOCAL INCOME TAX A DETERRENT FOR POTENTIAL NON-DUBLINERS LOOKING FOR WORK IN THE CITY?**

No. They will have to pay it if they work in any other municipality in the area. Where we do pay attention, although it's not a big influencer, is that the two per cent tax is on net profit for our business community. But because it's a pretty level playing field for the charge of the tax, it doesn't influence the decision to locate in Dublin or in another municipality. We complete economic development agreements with businesses that are looking to expand or

relocate here in Dublin and part of the approach we take is to look at the job growth that will occur. Is there a portion of the tax proceeds from that job growth that we can redistribute back to the business as an incentive for locating here?

### **WHAT FINANCIAL SUPPORT DOES DUBLIN RECEIVE FROM YOUR STATE AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS?**

For our specific municipality, there isn't a lot. For specific projects, we will occasionally receive transportation dollars from the federal government. That doesn't happen very often. We actually don't receive a lot of our budget from the state government. It's an unusual case for Dublin as a lot of local governments in Ohio are in a revenue sharing program with the state. Dublin does participate but it makes up less than two per cent of our budget. It doesn't heavily influence our policies. We have been fortunate enough to have a successful formula here to be able to finance those needs locally.

## II. INFRASTRUCTURE

### **MUNICIPALITIES IN BOTH CANADA AND THE US HAVE FAILED TO SET ASIDE ENOUGH FUNDS TO FINANCE THE FUTURE REPLACEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF VITAL INFRASTRUCTURE. IS DUBLIN IN THE SAME BOAT?**

We've definitely been planning for the future. To a certain extent the future is now on the maintenance side. There has been so much capital growth in such a short period of time that we are now having to replace the infrastructure that is passed its useful life span. But one of the ways we planned for this goes back to when the local voters approved the two percent income tax. Twenty-five per cent of those income tax proceeds goes towards a capital improvement tax fund. From the beginning we recognized that capital improvement needs dedicated ongoing funding so we set up that revenue source with the initial voter approval of the tax.

### **IT MUST BE HELPFUL TO HAVE A GUARANTEED AND LOCAL SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR ONGOING INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING. MOST CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES HAVE TO COUNT ON MONEY TRICKLING DOWN FROM THE PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS.**

Certainly here in Ohio, not all communities have the ability to set that amount of money aside. We have made the conscious business decision to make it work.

## III. CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

### **98 PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS TO DUBLIN'S 2010 CITIZEN SATISFACTION SURVEY GAVE THE CITY A GRADE OF A OR B WHEN ASKED TO RATE THE COMMUNITY AS A PLACE TO LIVE. HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE ON THOSE STELLAR RESULTS?**

The harder question is: how can you maintain those results? First, we maintain an ongoing dialogue with our residents through a variety of venues so we keep a pulse on what the community's view is of our services. It allows us to manage expectations and to un-

derstand when service levels drop or improve. We remember our core services, and make sure we deliver them effectively.

#### **WHY CONDUCT A CITIZEN SATISFACTION SURVEY?**

We actually conduct two surveys. The Citizen Satisfaction Survey lets us know what people who live here think of the city, and that's really important information that helps us to know how to tweak services, to know how residents like to receive information from the city, to find out how specific services are making a difference in the day to day life of residents, and to make sure we are hitting those critical markers that our council sets. But the other survey we participate in is the National Citizen's Survey which gives us data to benchmark our services against other communities in the country. It gives us an understanding of where we fit into the larger picture. What do our services look like compared to other communities' services? If we have a service area that our residents do not rate quite as highly, we know where else to look for best practices in the country. We've only done that survey once, but we plan to do it again.

### **IV. DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION**

#### **WHAT ROLE DOES THE DUBLIN ENTREPRENEURIAL CENTER (DEC) PLAY IN YOUR CITY?**

It's an exciting place. The median business in Dublin has only seven employees. So although it's important to have our large corporations here, we realize we need to foster our small businesses as well. The DEC grew out of that idea and really set itself up with the mission to support the creation and development of new technologies, businesses, and jobs. It does this by providing a lot of different services that support the entrepreneurial mind and brings in resources for the entrepreneur all to one location. Some businesses are located within the DEC but there are also formal training opportunities and informal networking events held at the DEC to host professionals that might work right out of their homes but want to interact with other professionals from time to time.

#### **HOW IS THE CITY OF DUBLIN UTILIZING GIS TECHNOLOGY?**

GIS is fully integrated into our daily activities here. We use it for land use planning and utility mapping. It's a tool that's really helpful for showing historical change in the community and for helping us to integrate the variety of data we have into a single platform. From looking at roadway alignment in a high level planning conversation to dealing with the resident that has a question about the storm drain outside of his or her house so we can look up the exact location of that asset.

#### **HAVE YOU DEVELOPED ANY PARTNERSHIPS TO DESIGN AND MAINTAIN YOUR GIS TECHNOLOGY?**

Within our information technology division, we have a GIS team of three professionals that maintain the system.

#### **DO YOU USE GIS FOR ASSET MANAGEMENT?**

We do. We are currently working on using it for tracking our fleet for snow removal.

#### **FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS, DUBLIN HAS BEEN NAMED ONE OF THE TOP SEVEN INTELLIGENT COMMUNITIES IN THE WORLD FOR INNOVATION IN TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION. WHAT PUT DUBLIN ON THE LIST?**

A lot of hard work. One of the things that put us on that list is our

innovative underground fibre optic network called DUBLINK, which is municipally managed. It also ties in to our Central Ohio Research Network, which links government, businesses and schools to the larger system; the Ohio Super Computer Centre, which in essence allows world connectivity for those that tap into that system. Also, the DEC promoting the use and development of technology and the deployment of Wi-Fi city wide, are other big ones for us. We do a lot of partnering with our education and business communities for their workforce needs now and for what they are forecasting [for the future]. This year's Intelligent Communities Forum process had its focus on health, so we are lucky in Dublin that we have a lot of innovators in the medical and health field. That ranges from medical devices, and the technology behind them, to one of the most wired hospitals that is only three years old. It's a remarkable facility. Talk about changing the face of health care. We also have the headquarters of Cardinal Health, a global provider of medical and pharmaceutical services. There is a lot going on. We're in the process now of working with a company to develop health pods for videoconferencing with medical providers.

#### **ARE YOU CONFIDENT THAT DUBLIN CAN TAKE THE TOP SPOT THIS YEAR AND BE THE INTELLIGENT COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR?**

We would love to take it but we're not going to deny that there is some great competition. But the great thing about that competition is that it gives us these other cities to learn from and exchange ideas with.

### **V. PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

#### **WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES THAT THE CITY OF DUBLIN IS CURRENTLY FACING?**

First, we are in the process of transitioning from a stage of growing to maintenance. Our population is starting to age a bit. It's requiring us to look at redevelopment. We are looking at one area of the city for significant redevelopment to make into a more walkable urban environment, rather than following the traditional suburban pattern.

#### **IS SUCCESSION PLANNING A CONCERN?**

We're working on it. When we look at the numbers of who is eligible to retire in the next few years, there is the potential for some leadership gaps. But we have also invested a lot in our organization in training and development to have people that can compete when it is time to step up and move forward.

#### **WHAT HAS REMAINED THE SAME IN DUBLIN OVER THE LAST 200 YEARS?**

Physically, we have maintained our historical district to preserve some of that time from the last 100 to 200 years, as well as the cultural components of our community. Even though Dublin has rapidly grown from 5000 people in 1987 to 42,000 today, the hospitable nature of the people in Dublin continues to be there and has been an asset to welcoming people into our community. Folks like it here.