SHARON PUBLIC WORKS SUPERINTENDENT USES WATERSMART SOFTWARE TO BUILD VISIBILITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Eric Hooper has been superintendent of Sharon Public Works for almost 15 years. Before that, he served as Town Engineer for almost 21 years. Needless to say, he's seen a lot of change in the affluent town of more than 18,000 residents.

One of the most substantive turning points from a water usage standpoint, occurred in the early 2000's. The economy was booming and local residents were renovating kitchens and baths. Plumbing codes had evolved and more efficient appliances were installed as a result. The Sharon community as a whole began to develop a water conscience that led to the political decision to curtail irrigation systems and outdoor water use.

"Once you make the decision to do that, people become much more aware of the water they're using" recalls Hooper. With that awareness, came the opportunity to educate residents about the Sharon Water Department, water costs and additional water conservation opportunities. That's where, and when, WaterSmart came into the picture.

Eric had recently attended an annual American Water Works Conference in Boston. While touring the event, he stopped at the WaterSmart booth and watched a demonstration of a web-based platform for engaging local residents and creating a bridge between water providers and consumers. Shortly after the show Eric received a follow-up call from one of WaterSmart's senior representatives who was also an old friend from Sharon.

The WaterSmart team got to work and built not only a website but the Sharon Water Department brand and messaging. They made the site professional looking, ("glossy" according to Eric) and included key functionality to create a closer relationship between residents and the Water Department. Water usage monitoring, bill paying, water efficient plumbing and appliance reviews, drought resistant landscaping— the WaterSmart site became a true hub of information for residents looking to conserve water or those who just wanted to become more involved in water usage.

Hooper and his team also use the WaterSmart email blast function to educate residents on signs of issues with their water systems. For example, a spike in water consumption may indicate a leak. He also uses it to communicate when to expect the annual springtime flushing that may cause a temporary discoloration in the water.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted residential consumption since are people spending more time at home, making their own coffee and flushing toilets more during the day. Eric and his team send out emails to keep people apprised of the effect of the health crisis on water usage. "They see it as the town reaching out. It makes the Water Department visible to residents of the town."

https://townofsharon.watersmart.com/index.php/welcome

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