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Complaints line goes online

Kirkland residents can track responses, are guaranteed action, mayor says

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Do you ever wonder what happens when you complain to city hall?

Does your complaint get prompt action or do you suspect it gets tossed into the round file, never to be seen again? Those suspicions can be set aside in Kirkland, where town officials just launched iCARE (computer automated request exchange), an online request/complaint/suggestion box that allows a complainant to track his or her file and guarantees a reply.

"With a simple click of the mouse, residents can register a complaint, put forth a request, submit a claim or just get information - and access is available at all times, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," Mayor John Meaney said as he launched the online service.

The town spent \$20,000 for the system, in a private/public partnership with Techtra, a Brossard company.

"We want to ensure that once a citizen makes a complaint, it will be followed," Meaney said, adding that residents can consult the service from their homes or offices, by using the public computers at the municipal library or any location with internet access. Residents without internet access can also use the service by telephone, at a point of service or even through regular mail, as every communication will get a file number, which can then be tracked.

Every submission will get an acknowledgement of receipt, a reference number and the name of a contact person, a Web address for follow-ups, an estimated timeline for the resolution of the request, a notice when the issue is resolved and, last, an invitation to complete a client satisfaction survey.

Jules Renaud, Kirkland's interim town manager, said employees have used the system for five months with the result that complaints or issues are being handled faster than before. He said some town workers were initially wary.

"Change can be a frightening thing but once they got used to the new system, it was fine." Though iCARE, councillors can track requests or complaints in their districts and check to see how they have been resolved, Meaney said.

Mayors of other cities appeared to be interested in the new technology; Beaconsfield's Bob Benedetti, Pointe Claire's Bill McMurchie and Dollard des Ormeaux's Ed Janiszewski attended the launch of the iCARE system.

To access iCARE, visit the city of Kirkland's website at www.ville.kirkland.qc.ca and click on the iCARE icon aambroziak@thegazette.canwest.com