

## Town of Amherst, Massachusetts

### Influencing the Quality and Value of New Technology and Realizing Benefits through the Munis Early Adopter Program

**Industry:** Local Government

**Location:** Amherst, MA

**Employees:** 800

**Years as a Tyler Client:** 13

**Budget:** \$78 million

**Tyler Products Used:** Munis®, Tyler Content Manager, TylerForms

**Population:** 35,000

**The Facts:** Located on 27.7 square miles of Pioneer Valley in western Massachusetts, the Town of Amherst is home to more than 600 businesses as well as Amherst College, Hampshire College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. An environmental and cultural center, Amherst features more than 80 miles of trails through diverse habitats, houses the Emily Dickinson Museum, and was home to Robert Frost during his time spent teaching at Amherst College. The Town is governed by both a select board and a town meeting made up of elected representatives from each precinct.

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#### Key Challenges

- Become a more sustainable community by initiating new “green” programs
- Utilize and test new technology to influence the quality and feature value of their ERP system
- Gain buy in from Town administrators and end users for participating in the Munis Early Adoption Program

#### Benefits: Financial and Beyond

- Implemented new electronic, Web-based applications that reduce paper, printing and storage costs
- Gained access to new Munis technology, programs and applications before general release to clients
- Played an important role in shaping and testing new releases of Munis
- Enhanced credibility of the IT Department, in turn helping them to secure funds for additional projects
- Enabled managers—including the town manager—to easily access key data for informed decision making

#### In Their Own Words:

“The Accounting Department—the heaviest users of Munis in the Town—was running the Silverlight Web Client for a week before anyone mentioned it to IT. It was so intuitive to use, users didn’t question the change; they knew instantly what to do and how to do it quickly.”

– Kris Pacunas, IT Director

#### Town of Amherst Best Practices

- Worked closely with Munis Early Adopter staff and Town users to implement new versions of Munis without interruption to business processes
- Developed custom dashboards for each manager to gain buy in for the project
- Petitioned and received funding to implement additional Munis applications in 2011

#### Why Tyler?

- Tyler has more than 30 years of experience providing software and services to the public sector
- Tyler has an established, successful Early Adopter program for select clients to implement and test new releases of Munis prior to general release
- The Munis enterprise resource planning (ERP) suite is a fully-integrated software solution
- Tyler is the largest company solely dedicated to providing software and services to the public sector

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## Beginning the Early Adopter Experience

The Town of Amherst was facing a considerable amount of changes in August of 2010 when they agreed to participate in Tyler's Munis® Early Adoption (EA) Program. In the six months prior, they had significant personnel changes, converted the Town's database structure from Informix® to SQL®, completely restructured several departments and upgraded to Munis Version 8.1.

Popular with clients, the Munis EA Program is one way Tyler brings clients into the software vetting process by involving them in an intense testing program of quality assurance checks, usability testing, regression testing and other client-specific product review situations. Not only are Early Adopters the first to use the latest and greatest features, applications and technology, they directly influence the quality and feature value of Munis.

"Though we reluctantly committed to the Munis Version 8.2 EA program thinking we would be in Beta testing mode, we quickly realized the difference between Beta testing and Tyler's EA Program. Munis Version 8.2 over delivered on every piece," said IT Director Kris Pacunas. By September the Town was live on Version 8.2 and Tyler was looking for sites to begin testing its Version 9.0 release. Pacunas jumped at the chance to be part of the EA program again. "It's no surprise we decided to go with the 9.0 EA program," he said. "It was one of the best decisions of my career."

## Munis Version 9: A Silverlight Solution

According to Pacunas Version 9 is by far the biggest technological leap forward for Munis. "I've been involved with Munis for more than 10 years. I've seen Munis evolve from a Cobol-based system to a Microsoft® .Net solution. I hoped Tyler would take the product to Silverlight® and make it fully Web-based." And that's just what Tyler has done.

Munis now employs a 100% Silverlight browser-based client that provides direct access to the Microsoft .Net framework. For users at the Town of Amherst, this has meant an improved user experience with seamless integration between the core Munis and central programs. The fastest version to date, Munis provides Amherst managers and end users with easy access to more data than ever before. "If you know how to browse a Web page you can use Munis Version 9," stressed Pacunas.

## Enhanced Dashboard, Workflow and More

One of the biggest—and most positive—changes the Town has seen with Version 9 is the enhancement of the Tyler Role-Tailored Dashboard. Based on Microsoft SharePoint®, the Dashboard integrates data from all areas of Munis into one easily accessible screen via customizable Web parts. To demonstrate its usefulness

and to help gain buy in from Town users, the Munis EA team and the Amherst IT Department worked together to build customized dashboards for each manager that are populated with the relevant data needed to make informed decisions and to effectively do their jobs. "The Dashboard is something we can be proud to put in front of our managers. It gives them access to the information they need as decision makers," explained Pacunas. "It allows us all to do things users would normally have to call around for, such as viewing open permits and violations. The town manager can now do this himself even from home or during off hours."

Other improvements benefitting the Town are the creation of a General Ledger (GL) Fund Monitor and the implementation of an enhanced workflow system. "Normally it takes a lot of effort to locate and bring up funds one by one and manually find errors, validate, etc.," said Pacunas. The GL Fund Monitor generates a list of Town funds and associated accounts, enabling fast analysis. What's more, with the addition of the Workflow Command Center and improved workflow processing, users now have an easy way to view approval processes and administrators can ensure the Town's workflow routing is in line with business practices.

During the Version 9.0 EA process the Town also implemented new Munis applications and Tyler products—including Munis Employee and Citizen Self Services, TylerForms and Tyler Content Manager—all of which meet the town manager's commitment to becoming a more sustainable community through "green" initiatives. Fully electronic programs, these new applications are reducing the Town's paper, printing and storage costs, and are helping Town employees and citizens gain fast access to data.

## Smooth Transition Benefits All

According to Pacunas, being a Version 9.0 Early Adopter was a positive experience, one that did not disrupt users' work. With its enhanced features and faster speed, Munis Version 9 is designed to look like earlier desktop versions, providing an easy transition for clients. "The Accounting Department—the heaviest users of Munis in the Town—was running the Silverlight Web Client for a week before anyone mentioned it to IT. It was so intuitive to use, users didn't question the change; they knew instantly what to do and how to do it quickly," he stressed.

The success of the Munis EA programs has also enhanced the IT Department's credibility, even helping the department secure funding for future projects. "What we did in 60 days with Munis changed how we do everything," said Pacunas. Looking to the future, he sees a product that will continue to grow as Tyler utilizes the latest technology and offers new enhancements. "I'm excited to see where Tyler will take this product over the next one, two, three years."