

# Gravity Union helps the City of White Rock unlock new benefits for employees and citizens with SharePoint Online and Microsoft Power Platform



## Challenge: White Rock's on-premises infrastructure was limiting usability

The city's on-premises SharePoint solution was not easy to access remotely and was not as user friendly as desired.

## Solution: Migrating to the cloud with SharePoint Online and Microsoft Azure

Gravity Union helped White Rock migrate key infrastructure to the cloud, greatly improving functionality and user experience.

## Results: Reduced maintenance costs and improved user experience

With the cloud, the city was able to decrease their maintenance costs and unlock new benefits for employees and citizens alike.

In any industry, you'll find some organizations that are slow to embrace change and others that are trailblazers. When it comes to using cutting-edge technology to better serve its citizens, the City of White Rock, BC is a trailblazer.

Their IT team runs more like a startup than a government agency. When new technology offers a chance to benefit the city's citizens or employees, White Rock moves swiftly to explore it, launching technological initiatives with impressive agility. As is often the case with government organizations, city projects must adhere to strict, and sometimes complex, regulations. If the city were to handle this all on their own, it would significantly slow down their pace of innovation. Thankfully, they don't have to.

## Finding a partner in Gravity Union

Almost a decade ago, the City of White Rock partnered with [Gravity Union](#), a Canadian consultancy and Microsoft partner based in Vancouver, BC, to accelerate its digital transformation. Over the course of their partnership, Gravity Union has applied its unique, human-centric approach to innovation to help bring White Rock's technological dreams from the whiteboard into reality.

What makes this partnership special is its longevity. For nearly a decade, the City of White Rock and Gravity Union have been working together to modernize the city's IT infrastructure, striving to deliver new benefits to its citizens and employees alike. This partnership has enabled a steady stream of modernization initiatives consisting of blue-sky ideation, rapid prototype development, numerous pilot rollouts, and finally, implementation.

"Gravity Union is a key strategic partner in our rollout of SharePoint and Microsoft 365. Over the years, we've worked closely with Gravity Union on everything from the strategy, planning, training, to the implementation of Microsoft 365 including SharePoint Online, Power Apps, Power Automate, and Power BI."

— Chris Zota, IT Manager, City of White Rock

“The city is really in love with the Microsoft technology stack – they’ve been running on Microsoft for years. Our deep Microsoft expertise enables us support them in any domain or facet that they need,” notes Gravity Union founder Michael Schweitzer. “Everything ranging from Office 365 and SharePoint to Power Apps and Power BI... whatever technologies they want to explore, we’re ready to lend a hand.”

Over the years, White Rock and Gravity Union have completed numerous projects together, but recently they have collaborated on three critical engagements: moving to the cloud with SharePoint Online, streamlining employee training with the Microsoft Power Platform, and increasing operational transparency for citizens with Microsoft Power BI.

## Embracing the cloud with SharePoint Online

The City of White Rock had used SharePoint 2013 on-premises for its collaboration and employee portals for years. As the cloud became more prevalent, the city wondered if migrating to the cloud and using SharePoint Online, for example, would be right for them.

White Rock worked closely with Gravity Union to assess their options. After determining that migrating to the cloud would decrease their IT maintenance costs and improve ease of use, they were convinced – the city officially engaged Gravity Union to move the city’s portals, as well as other pieces of its IT infrastructure, to [SharePoint Online](#) and [Microsoft Azure](#).

Security was, and remains, a top priority for the city and Gravity Union. Early on, government agencies in Canada had been hesitant about moving infrastructure and services to the cloud, but since Microsoft has set up data centers in Canada and Canadian municipalities have received the legal go-ahead to use the cloud, more and more governmental bodies have chosen to make the move.

Gravity Union and White Rock started this migration by bolstering security for the city’s new cloud infrastructure. One of the first things they did was implement [Azure Active Directory](#) for employee authentication and authorization. This made it easier for the city’s IT team to manage employee access to city data and for employees to sign in remotely without sacrificing security. Gone are the days of slow VPNs with multiple passwords – now, city employees can securely access their apps from anywhere with single sign-on, conditional access, and multi-factor authentication. Gravity Union also helped the city use [Azure Information Protection](#) to identify and protect its confidential data, preventing its dissemination – accidental or otherwise.

When asked if Microsoft security was an important factor in the city’s decision to move to Microsoft Azure, Schweitzer said, “Our clients really appreciate the fact that security is a top priority for Microsoft, but they don’t make it hard on users. Their single sign-on approach is not a barrier to adoption – once I’m logged in, I have access to all of my files and apps in the cloud and I can utilize the full power of Office 365. This is the type of secure, seamless experience our clients have come to expect from us and Microsoft.”

Now, with the city’s digital infrastructure sitting securely in the cloud, Gravity Union and White Rock returned to their whiteboard with a renewed sense of possibility. They both knew that with the power of the cloud behind them, there were virtually no limits on what they could build for White Rock citizens and employees next.

## Streamlining employee training with the Microsoft Power Platform

One of the first challenges that White Rock decided to tackle with their new cloud infrastructure was revamping their employee training management. In its current state, the process was cumbersome, time-consuming, inefficient, and prone to errors and inaccuracies.

More specifically, the whole process was done manually with hundreds of emails and minimal tracking. If city employees wanted to sign up for a course, they had to email someone who could enroll them, leaving one person in charge of all course registration – a problem if that person ever went on vacation or took a new job. This complex process sometimes led to mix-ups where too few or too many employees would show up for training.

The city and Gravity Union knew there had to be a better way to facilitate employee trainings. Then, the idea struck – what if we gave employees the power to enroll themselves in

classes and make any changes they desire? This would give city employees more control over their own trainings and alleviate the management burden on administrators.

Gravity Union and White Rock utilized [Microsoft Power Apps](#) and [Power Automate](#) to revamp the workflow. With these tools, included in the city's move to SharePoint Online, people who aren't developers can build web and mobile applications without writing code. In no time, Gravity Union and White Rock had designed a functional architecture and successfully built a Power App to meet their needs.

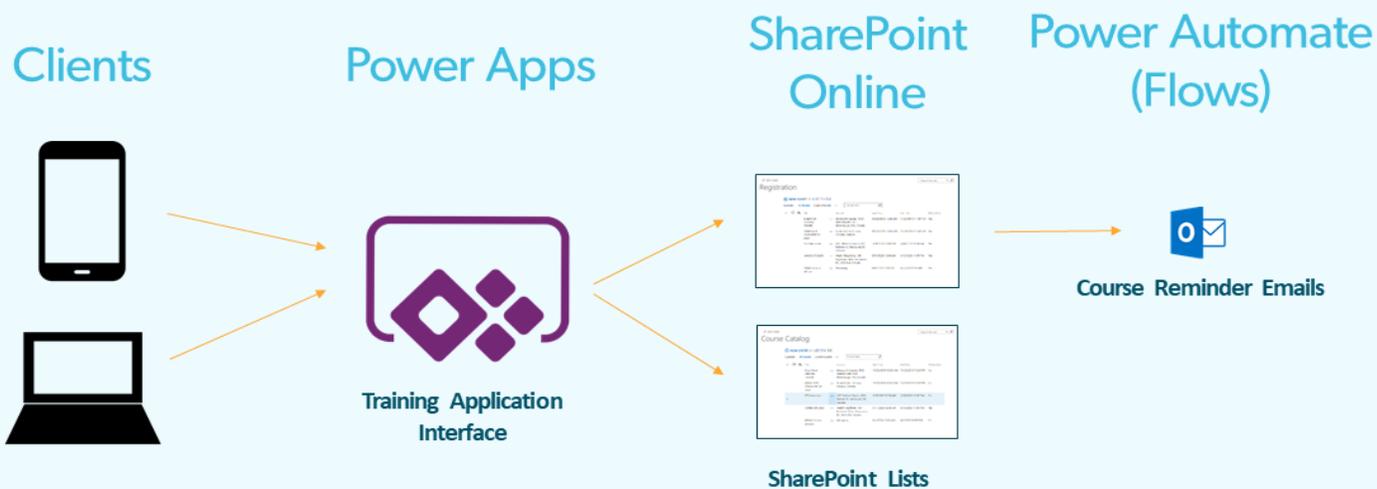
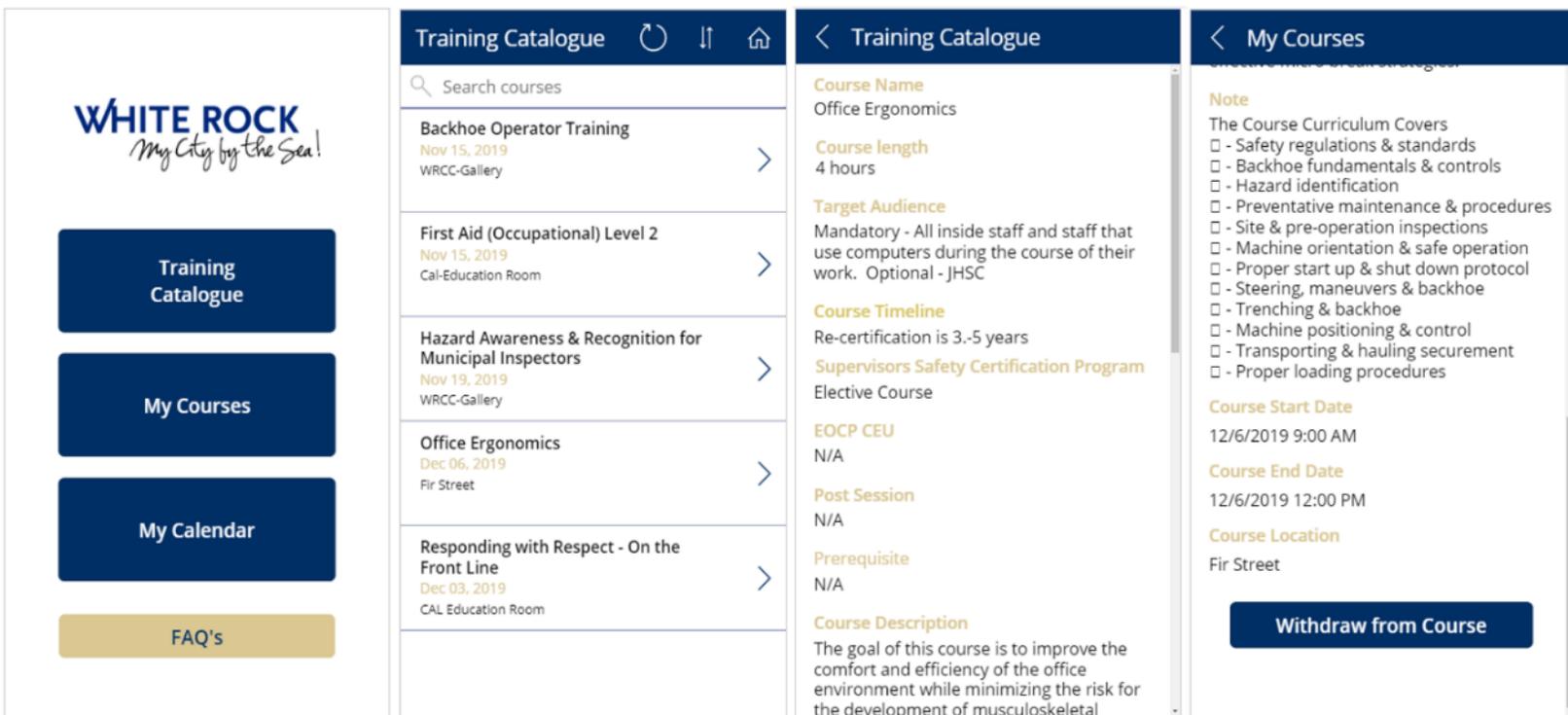


Diagram of the City of White Rock training application architecture (photo courtesy of Gravity Union)



Screenshots from the City of White Rock training application (photos courtesy of Gravity Union)

Currently, the city is running a pilot phase with the first iteration of the app. Gravity Union recommended a pilot to test the app's functionality and to make sure all the automated flows make sense when put into practice. It was also important to give the White Rock HR team time to get comfortable using SharePoint Online to manage training courses and to gather initial feedback from end-users.

Once the pilot is complete, Gravity Union and White Rock will review the feedback they've collected, update the app and workflow as necessary, and hopefully proceed to a broader rollout, empowering all city employees to take control of their own trainings and career development.

"Moving our Employee Portal to SharePoint Online was a huge benefit to enable our staff to stay connected and safe while working remotely. Prior to having our Employee Portal hosted in the cloud, our outside workers such as laborers, volunteer firefighters, and civilian police staff had no access to internal news and resources. The information dissemination is now faster and captures the entire workforce. As an increasing amount of our workload is shifted to the cloud, we spend much less time and cost on the support, troubleshooting and maintenance of our on-premises infrastructure. This allows us to focus more effort on high value solutions for the business that enables them to provide the best possible service for our community." — Chris Zota, IT Manager, City of White Rock

## Increasing transparency for citizens with Microsoft Power BI

While the White Rock training app was aimed at increasing operational efficiency, many other city initiatives have endeavored to increase transparency in city operations. One such project is the development of [Power BI](#) dashboards to convey relevant city information directly to citizens. These dashboards, which will be publicly available on the [city's website](#), will contain information about water quality in White Rock, relevant web analytics, and locations around the city that are generating the most bylaw calls. These reports transform table data into intuitive visualizations, making it easy for residents to see evidence of the city's efforts and their tax dollars at work.

## Looking ahead – the future of the Gravity Union and White Rock partnership

In just under a year, the City of White Rock has modernized their IT infrastructure with the cloud and support from Gravity Union, and they are just getting started. "White Rock knows you don't complete a digital transformation overnight," notes Schweitzer. "They are taking their time and really focusing on high-value solutions within the Microsoft stack to get the most out of their new cloud platform."

Not only will Gravity Union help the city test and implement these new solutions, they plan on

helping train the city's employees so they can manage their updated IT infrastructure independently. "We have a deep notion of partnering with the city to really enable them, and this goes beyond just implementation," adds Schweitzer. "We'll help them wrap up a project, but then we also train their people on the new technology so they can take over management and maintenance themselves. That's really high value for them – teaching them how to fish, if you will."

Looking ahead, Gravity Union and White Rock plan to continue working together to innovate. "We're really looking forward to exploring new Microsoft solutions as they get released, especially AI-powered offerings like [Project Cortex](#) and [SharePoint Syntex](#)," Schweitzer concludes. "We're a bleeding edge organization and Microsoft is creating a great framework to make sure that partners like us are up to speed on the newest technology so we, in turn, can give that value back to our clients and customers. It's going to be an exciting year for us as we continue to work closer with Microsoft and White Rock."



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