Cash injection for Regina wastewater, transit upgrades

City of Regina to draw more than $15 million from public reserves

By Dean Gutheil, CBC News

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City council unanimously approves money for upgrades

Ottawa and the province are injecting millions of dollars into Regina's infrastructure needs, but the city will have to pony up as well.

In a hastily called special meeting Monday morning, Regina city councillors unanimously approved more than $15 million from reserves to help pay for wastewater and transit upgrades.

It comes after Ottawa committed about $22 million and the province around $7 million to upgrade the city's infrastructure.

Regina Mayor Michael Fougere defended the decision to draw money from the reserve fund.

"We're building our city," said Fougere. "We have two orders of government saying we're going to fund infrastructure with you. Are you on board? And I make no apologies saying we're on board."

Ottawa's contribution is the first phase of the Liberals' promise to spend $60 billion for infrastructure renewal over the next decade. The first phase is focused on public transit and community water and wastewater systems.
Fougere said taking the city's portion of the money from public reserves is good news for taxpayers.

"That will mean there's no direct impact on taxpayers today and we're not taking on any more debt as well," said Fougere. "That's why having reserves are critical so we can respond to issues that come about very quickly."

According to a city administration report, the infrastructure money will be used for many upgrades, among them:

- 17 buses and nine paratransit buses ($10.95 million).
- Upgrades to McCarthy Boulevard pump station ($15 million).
- Wastewater collection and drainage system upgrades ($7.4 million).

Fougere said when Ottawa and the province offer money, city politicians would be foolish not to accept it.

"We have an opportunity to get 50 cent dollars on wastewater upgrades, why wouldn't we do that?" said Fougere. "We have a significant amount of money from the federal government on transit. Why wouldn't we take that opportunity?"

Despite the new money, Fougere says the City of Regina still has a $2 billion infrastructure deficit.

The focus of phase two of the Liberals' infrastructure is still being negotiated with municipal leaders but Fougere already has his wish list.

"We need road rebuilds, underground pipes, recreation facility upgrades, " said Fougere. "We have a host of things that need to be done. But phase one is still being rolled out so that's our focus for now."