

# Communities getting waste-water cash

## No money yet for Winnipeg's facility upgrade

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JOE BRYKSA / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS files

OTTAWA — Some fast-growing communities in southern Manitoba are breathing a sigh of relief as funds for new waste-water treatment systems start to flow.

But the City of Winnipeg is still waiting for federal funds for its North End Water Treatment Plant upgrade.

Under Ottawa's new \$2-billion Clean Water and Wastewater Fund, more than \$49 million was allocated to 23 projects across Manitoba this summer for everything from waterline expansions to lagoon expansions and new waste-water treatment plants.

Winnipeg's \$800-million North End Water Treatment Plant upgrade was not among them.

Winnipeg to date hasn't received a dime from Ottawa for the plant upgrade. The South End Water Treatment Plant was also on Winnipeg's ask list from the new water fund, but it also hasn't yet been approved. That project has already received \$53 million from other federal infrastructure programs.

A spokesman for Mayor Brian Bowman said the city is still hoping Ottawa will come through with some money down the road.

Other municipalities, several of which have seen development grind to a halt as waste-water systems hit capacity, got much better news.

One of them is St. Pierre-Jolys, which will get up to \$1.5 million from Ottawa for its lagoon expansion. The province is contributing up to \$750,000, and the village is putting up \$750,000.

St. Pierre-Jolys had to stop all new building in 2012 when its lagoon hit capacity. The village grew by one-third, to 1,200 from 800 people, between 2006 and 2011.

"Our town has been growing, and we want to keep the momentum going," said Mayor Mona Bruneau Fallis. "It's a lot of money for a small community."

The expansion will allow up to 2,000 people to live in the village, and a second phase can be added later with capacity for another 800 people.

Developers are desperately waiting for the new lagoon to start building again, and Bruneau Fallis said things are finally moving. The village hopes to have the tender awarded by the end of the year so construction can begin as soon as possible in the spring. New homes can start up but can't be connected to the waste-water system until the new lagoon is finished, hopefully by the fall of 2017.

The process to apply for funds from provincial and federal programs proved troublesome, and the first application was rejected for being incomplete. The confusion had a significant cost. In 2012 when the problem was first noted, engineers estimated it would cost \$1.3 million to expand the lagoon. Now it's upwards of \$2.7 million.

Manitoba Indigenous and Municipal Relations Minister Eileen Clarke said her government is working on developing a one-stop application process for municipalities for infrastructure programs, something the Tories promised during the election. Manitoba is also starting regional roundtables with municipalities this week to discuss various infrastructure programs and priorities.

Clarke said her government's focus is on projects that are strategic, offer value for money and have a tangible outcome.

Six months ago, Winkler Mayor Martin Harder told the *Free Press* he was exasperated with the infrastructure process after submitting a joint application with Morden and the RM of Stanley for a new waste-water treatment facility to serve all three communities. Not a word had been heard for nine months, and development had ground to a halt. Winkler had to turn down a request to expand a trailer park, and other new development is on hold.

Harder said after the story appeared, things started to move, meetings were called and this summer the first stage of money was approved. Winkler will get \$1.8 million toward the engineering studies and design. He said the current program only funded projects that could be completed by March 2018, and the Winkler/Morden water-treatment facility would not make that deadline.

Harder said the cities, which are also working in concert with the RM of Stanley, will now be shovel-ready to make an application under future infrastructure programs.