

Sewage plant waiting on federal cash

Region needs to build new plant by 2020 but funding still an issue

Justin Beddall / North Shore News

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North Shore residents will be flushing extra cash down the toilet if senior governments don't soon commit to a cost-sharing formula for the new Lions Gate sewage treatment plant project.

The regional government has until the end of 2020 to complete a new \$700-million secondary treatment plant on the North Shore but has yet to formally secure funding agreements with the federal and provincial governments.

This week, the federal government provided a \$175,000 grant towards the feasibility study for the plant but much larger costs loom.

"We're going to need support from the province and feds. It's a huge bill, \$700 million, and we'd probably have to pay for

(Metro Vancouver's) portion of it over 15 years," said City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto, chair of the Metro Vancouver Utilities Committee.

In a worst-case scenario, that could see sewage bills for North Shore homeowners double - or possibly even more - by 2030.

"You'd see it right on your utility bill - it would show you a big huge increase. If we don't get that support it would be a very significant increase to your sewage and drainage levy," said Mussatto. North Shore municipalities that would benefit more from the new treatment plant, North Vancouver and West Vancouver, would pay more than taxpayers in other areas of the Lower Mainland.

The current Lions Gate Wastewater Treatment Plant has been operating as a primary treatment facility for 50 years but new regulations require that it be upgraded to a secondary treatment facility.

So far, the regional government has already spent approximately \$20 million on engineering, public consultation and preliminary designs for the new sewage plant.

"Even though it seems like a long way off it's a very tight timeline," said Mussatto. "We're going to need to have a decision this spring from the federal and provincial governments on the cost-sharing formula or we will not be able to meet the timeline."

The Federally mandated project should see the feds contribute more than 1/3 - especially since municipalities collect far fewer of our tax dollars than either the province or the feds. - cjk

Metro Vancouver hopes to share the project capital costs equally with the province and federal government.

"We're really hoping to get the one-third, one-third, onethird, funding formula, which is what Victoria got," said Mussatto, noting that a similar-sized waste treatment plant planned for the province's capital has already been funded even though a site hasn't been secured.

"Their money has already been allocated. And here we are, we have a location and First Nations approval, all set and ready to go but we just can't get the funding. All we're asking for is the same funding formula Victoria got."

Mussatto said there have been productive talks with the senior governments over the past two months.

"I met yesterday with our MP Jonathan Wilkinson and I've met with him a number of times about the project itself. We've been meeting with our MLAs who are in support. Now it's just a matter of the cabinet, the premier and her cabinet team, making a decision as a priority," said Mussatto, noting that the project needs to be made a provincial priority. "And hopefully with the province and the feds coming together with the municipality we'll be able to fund this thing."

Wilkinson said he's talked about the project with the infrastructure minister on several occasions and the federal government is well aware of the importance of the project for Metro Vancouver. "I'm actually just coming from a speech he made at the Vancouver Board of Trade where he referenced the Lions Gate project as the type of project that the portion of infrastructure that's focused on green infrastructure is suited for. So. .. we're getting towards the point where hopefully we can make a commitment."

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The site of the new Lions Gate sewage treatment plant has been chosen, but just who will pay for the \$700 million secondary treatment plant remains the big question.