

One of the largest infrastructure projects in Port Alberni's history is being undertaken just across the Somass River. The expansion and redevelopment of the City's sewage treatment facility is part of a long-range, multi-phased effort to manage our city's wastewater (ie: sewage) to ensure protection of public health and the environment and achieve compliance with new federal and provincial regulatory requirements.

## **WHY IS AN UPGRADE TO THE SEWAGE TREATMENT FACILITY NEEDED?**

Municipal sewage treatment is subject to regulations and standards set by the provincial government and, since 2012, now the federal government as well. Planning for the replacement of the City's current sewage treatment facility has been ongoing for many years due to persistent challenges with meeting the standards for discharge of treated wastewater. Aside from the regulatory requirements, properly collecting, treating and disposing of our community's wastewater is critical to our continued health and wellbeing. Untreated or undertreated wastewater can pose significant risks to our own health, local aquatic ecosystems and species, and can impact our quality of life through odors and other negative effects.

## **WHAT IS THE LIQUID WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN (LWMP)?**

The upgrade to the sewage treatment facility is part of a larger process set out by the province for communities across BC to establish comprehensive, long term strategies for dealing with all aspects of liquid waste. The planning process, known as a liquid waste management plan (LWMP), is a guidance document that details each community's solutions for managing wastewater. The plan is required to be developed in 3 stages: examine existing conditions and develop options; evaluate options and select preferred choice(s); and develop a plan with projected funding.

## **WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED FOR SEWAGE TREATMENT?**

As part of the LWMP process the City developed and evaluated three options for future wastewater treatment. They included three different approaches that ranged in value (present day) from approximately \$42 million to \$60 million. The City felt strongly that a more cost-effective solution could be achieved by utilizing and upgrading the adjacent paper mill lagoon and so delayed a decision regarding the existing options to pursue discussions with the owners of the mill. An agreement in principle was reached with Catalyst Paper for the acquisition of the lagoon and other property in 2010, opening the door for the City to pursue its preferred option, a secondary aeration treatment system.

## **WHAT IS THE COST OF THE NEW SEWAGE TREATMENT FACILITY?**

The total cost for the acquisition and upgrade of the sewage treatment facility is estimated at \$27.7 million. While the capital improvements to the sewage treatment facility are still in the design phase, the City has spent: \$5.3 million to purchase the lagoon; \$1 million on engineering and environmental studies; and \$1.9 million on the removal of sludge from the new lagoon facility.

In 2011 as part of preparation of a grant application, the total project was estimated at \$14.2 million, which did not include the cost of purchasing the lagoon. This was based on early conceptual plans, senior government regulations at the time, and assessments of the infrastructure. The scope and cost of the project have increased significantly since that time due to requirements of new federal regulations and increased infrastructure acquisition costs. Infrastructure not originally budgeted for and now required includes the construction of a 1.2km long effluent discharge system.

## **WHO IS PAYING FOR THIS?**

The Government of Canada and Province of BC are currently committed to provide 40% of the total project costs, with the City responsible for the balance.

In 2016 the City increased sewer and water rates for all customers. These changes were introduced to ensure the long term sustainability of these services by providing adequate funding to operate, repair, maintain and renew existing utility infrastructure. Revenues are not projected to cover the additional costs associated with the sewage treatment facility; however, the City is actively developing plans to address this matter.

## **CAN THE CITY GET MORE GRANT FUNDING FOR THE PROJECT?**

In January of 2012 it was announced that the City was successful in achieving an \$11.2 million grant for the project. This was the largest grant ever received by the City and one of the largest awards by the federal General Strategic Priorities Fund. In fact, of the 300 grants awarded under the first Gas Tax Agreement from 2005-2014, there were only three grants across the province that were larger.

The City will be pursuing further grant opportunities as they become available. City Council and staff are working closely with provincial and federal government representatives to identify and secure additional grants.

### WHY DOES THIS UPGRADE COST SO MUCH?

Wastewater treatment facilities are complex and costly. Communities across the country are making significant investments to meet new regulations and guidelines. Within BC a number of communities have faced or are facing similar challenges, including: a \$28 million upgrade in Cranbrook; \$24 million upgrade in Penticton; a \$43 million upgrade in Kamloops; and projected project costs of \$22 million in Sechelt; \$56 million in the Comox Valley; and \$25 million in Powell River. The financial burden on communities is significant and only compounds the existing funding gap municipalities are facing in the replacement of roads, buildings, bridges and other infrastructure.

### WHEN IS THE TREATMENT PLANT UPGRADE SCHEDULED TO BE COMPLETED?

Grant funding provided by the Government of Canada must be spent by March 2018 while new federal wastewater regulations require that the project be completed by 2020.

### WILL THE NEW TREATMENT PLANT IMPROVE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS IN THE HARBOUR?

The new sewage treatment plant will significantly improve the quality of the effluent, dramatically reduce any potential public health impacts and improve the aquatic habitat in the Alberni Inlet for all species. Detailed studies and an innovative design process have been undertaken in the plans for the discharge system to minimize impacts on salmon.

### HAS COMMUNITY INPUT BEEN CONSIDERED?

Community input and feedback is an important part of the development of a liquid waste management plan. The City has ensured that local interests are being considered through the formation of Technical and Public Advisory Committees and also through detailed consultation with the Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nations. This dialogue has brought significant value to the project by incorporating local knowledge and perspectives regarding the unique environmental, recreational and cultural aspects of the estuary, river and harbour.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

You can learn more about this project by visiting: [www.portalberni.ca/liquid-waste-management-plan](http://www.portalberni.ca/liquid-waste-management-plan) and review the documents and information there. You can also call the City's Engineering Department at 250-720-2830 or email [cityservice@portalberni.ca](mailto:cityservice@portalberni.ca)

