

NEW MUNICIPAL GROWTH INITIATIVE

Saskatchewan municipalities now have more access to funding for community planning thanks to a new \$1.1 million program. The province claims this new initiative is to support strong economic development and sustainable communities in Saskatchewan.

While we're not sure how far that kind of money will get anyone in the spendy world of community development, the province says the "Planning For Growth" program will provide funding for groups of municipalities who are working together to accommodate and encourage economic development and population growth in their regions.

Effectively it looks more like a carrot designed to get neighbors to work together. Keep in mind those kind of dollars can be eaten up by a single project such as a similar number going in as a portion towards one regional landfill in our area. Let's hope the Saskatchewan government is not think this "big" announcement will in any way replace other transfers promised to municipalities previously but held back due to recent budgetary constraints.

The \$1.1 million is not all provincial monies - Federal funding in the amount of \$600,000 is being provided through the Gas Tax Fund, with Enterprise Saskatchewan providing \$500,000. The program is to be administered by the provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

Regional economic development is, in many ways, the backbone of



Saskatchewan's ongoing growth and expansion, Enterprise Minister Ken Cheveldayoff said. "For this prosperity to continue and be supported, there must be the kind of collaboration that this program fosters between the various levels of government and the communities where ideas are born and take root."

"Our municipalities recognize that they need to work together to plan how their communities can grow and prosper," Municipal Affairs Minister Jeremy Harrison said. "I would like to acknowledge the leadership and hard work by the City Mayors' Caucus, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) and the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) in driving this initiative forward."

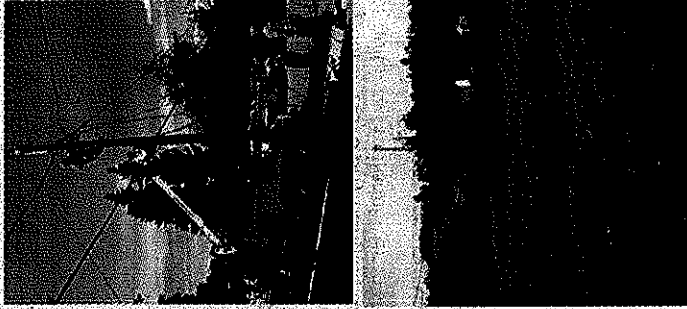
"This partnership is an excellent example of collaboration between our two levels of government," said Saskatoon-Rosetown-Biggar MP Kelly Block, on behalf of John Baird, Canada's Transport and

Infrastructure Minister. "The federal Gas Tax Fund is providing vital resources to communities to assist with long-term planning, and this initiative will further accelerate access to these resources, to the benefit of all Saskatchewan residents."

"Urban municipalities are grateful that the provincial and federal governments have responded to the call for support in promoting inter-municipal planning," SUMA President Allan Earle said. "The challenges facing municipalities are increasingly complex, and the best solutions are often found through collaboration. This program will provide the necessary resources to facilitate a collaborative planning environment between municipalities."

"Over the past few years we have experienced more growth and development in Saskatchewan than we have seen in many years," Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities president David Marit said. "This new program will be of great benefit to our urban and rural municipalities as they work together to accommodate growth and prepare for the future."

"Planning For Growth" strongly emphasizes regional cooperation. Municipalities are encouraged to work with each other, as well as with Enterprise Regions, First Nations, Métis and other partners to develop consistent policies for land use and development within and across municipal boundaries. These policies will help attract and direct investment, and will support economic development,



regional infrastructure planning and environmental protection.

The federal Gas Tax Fund delivers funding to local governments and other eligible recipients primarily for capital projects that lead to cleaner air, cleaner water or reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Funding is also available for planning projects that contribute to the sustainability of communities and regions.

The Government of Canada extended the Gas Tax Fund to 2014 resulting in a total of \$372 million in funding for municipal infrastructure in Saskatchewan. The Government of Canada announced in Budget 2008 that the Gas Tax Fund would become permanent beyond 2014 at \$2 billion per year nationally.

North of divide stands united

Mark Meinychuk
Meadow Lake Progress

Members of the North of Divide Communities Association took their first step towards a future of cooperation last Thursday.

The committee, made up of communities around north western Saskatchewan, held its latest monthly meeting at the Rural Municipality of Meadow Lake. Mayor Darwin Obrigewitch and councillor Toby Esterby were on hand to represent the city. Both took part in the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, a contract that will serve as a starting point for members to begin working on a community action plan.

While no member is required to take part in every endeavour the association embarks upon, serving chair Murray Rausch expressed his excitement at the possibility for future collaboration.

"I think one of the real positive advantages of us all being around the same table

where our differences lie and get a better sense of where it is we need to go," said Rausch.

Meadow Lake will be playing a crucial role in the young organization. The area's rural municipality will act as the sponsor for the NDCA's application for the provincial government's Planning for Growth initiative, which includes a \$100,000 grant. Officials estimated the project would cost the municipality \$15 per capita, but said a lower price could be negotiated if additional grants are stacked on top of the application.

As the organization begins its regional planning, the prospect of hiring a planning consultant was addressed. Members discussed the pros and cons of hiring a planner on as staff or by contract. Hiring a planner by contract would mean faster results, but at a higher cost. The committee agreed to file a request for proposals for a plan before making any final decisions.

Members also discussed the hiring a bylaw enforcement officer

for all participating communities. While Meadow Lake may have its own officer, other municipalities have struggled to achieve bylaw compliance and are relying on Reeves or councillors to tackle infractions.

Mayor Obrigewitch warned the municipalities of the immense responsibility the job would entail. He explained how an officer would need to familiarize themselves with the unique set of bylaws for each of the NDCA's five communities, all of which are a great distance apart.

"You start looking at the miles between there, you could drive all day and never get anything done," said Obrigewitch.

The association's next meeting will be held in Loon Lake's council chambers on Oct. 14. A workshop on emergency measurement planning will also be held in Goodsoil on Nov. 14.

The North of Divide Communities Association is made up of Meadow Lake, Dorintosh, Goodsoil, Pierceland and Loon Lake.



Mark Meinychuk, Meadow Lake Progress
City councillor Toby Esterby and Mayor Darwin Obrigewitch sit with development officer Tanya Doucette at the North of Divide Community Association's latest monthly meeting in Meadow Lake on Sept. 16.