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Springfield water borrowing passed

By Tony Zerucha

The RM of Springfield's council narrowly passed a bylaw to borrow \$12.56 million for a new water treatment plant for Dugald and Oakbank.

According to the RM of Springfield, Oakbank's current water treatment plant cannot provide enough treated water to the community based on current growth patterns. The new one will be able to serve 21,000 people as Springfield grows over the next two decades.

The work begins with building a new Oakbank and Dugald water treatment plant midway between the two towns. Plans also include upgrades to current pumps and two water treatment plants in Oakbank and Dugald. Up to three raw water wells will be added in Dugald, and pipeline capacity will be increased between the new plant and Dugald raw water well field. The Heatherdale raw water well field will be decommissioned, and a new pipeline from the new plant to Oakbank and Dugald will be built.

The estimated project cost is \$29.4 million. Springfield received a \$4.95 million grant from the Manitoba Water Services Board and a \$5.65 million grant from the Province of Manitoba. The municipality has allocated \$3.5 million from a pair of reserves and will devote some development fees from new building starts to annual repayments.

On June 19, council approved the borrowing by a 3-2 vote, with Mayor Pat Therrien and Couns. Melinda Warren and Glen Fuhl in favour. Couns. Mark Miller and Andy Kuczynski were opposed.

The meeting saw community members pack council chambers, with many vocally opposed to the funding. Therrien frequently admonished gallery members for interrupting other speakers throughout the three-hour meeting. Multiple petitions opposing the plant were presented, all claiming to have hundreds of signatures.

Miller called for the plant to be funded via a local improvement district (LID), whereby only users pay for the costs. CAO Colleen Draper said administration calculated the costs of an LID and presented them

at a past open house. The 1,335 customers would pay between \$417 and \$636 per year.

"Council agreed that wasn't feasible, so we went with the borrowing bylaw option," Draper said.

Miller and Kuczynski said they were concerned about debt accumulation.

"I'm very concerned about the \$11 million in potential debt repayment," Miller said. "That's an extraordinary amount of money we would all have to bear."

Kuczynski made allegations interest charges could almost double the debt to \$22 million.

"That's going to be taken from everybody for 20 years," he said. "That shortfall is going to come from taxpayers. We're going to have to be very careful with the borrowing. The money we receive from the federal government is still taxpayers' money, maybe not from this community, but you contribute to it."

"The money we're taking from reserves, it's your tax dollars. So you're still paying."

According to RM of Springfield policy however, development levies, not taxation, fund capital water reserves.

Fuhl said Springfield is wise to pay for the entire system now before it becomes more expensive. Building it in components over a longer period will also cost more.

"We have almost... \$12 million in grants," Fuhl said. "If we don't move forward, we won't get those grants. If we don't go now, we won't get another grant from the province."

"You're building that equity over time. That's what we're doing here; we're putting that infrastructure in place to build the equity for the economic development, the recreation centre, personal care homes... if anybody doesn't want to live in this community and doesn't want forward motion of growth, that's your decision. We have to move forward."

Citing a five-year capital plan, Kuczynski then alleged Springfield plans to borrow \$100 million over the next three years and pay another \$100 million in interest.

"We're going to withdraw from this community \$200 million in three years," Kuczynski said.

"That's absolutely wrong," Therrien



School's Out

Photo submitted


ESS grads Collin Clarke (back left), Brady Szajewski, Aiden Balzer, Jack Cuddie, Hayden Peers, Andie Boyko (front left), Alyssa Byra, Sarah Graves and Kyra Seddon close out their high school days with some fun in the sun during their grad parade in Beausejour June 21.

replied. "You're stirring up a lot of disinformation here."

According to the five-year capital plan on the municipal website, the total value of all projects envisioned over those five years is \$87.3 million. Total borrowing is \$53.4 million, split between the water treatment

plant (\$12.6 million), lagoon expansion (\$22 million) and recreation centre (\$18.8 million). Common practice is to put the entire project cost under borrowing and then lower that amount through fundraising and

See WATER on page 7



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