

Money flows to village for water meter system

Marcel Tetrault, Comox Valley Echo

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A \$400,000 grant from the provincial government for water meters in Cumberland means that the controversial devices may be installed as early as next spring.

The money will fund just under half of the capital cost of the \$809,738 project.

"This means we can move forward very soon with the water meter project," said Cumberland Mayor Fred Bates.



Cumberland council receive a \$400,000 cheque for water meters from Comox Valley MLA Stan Hagen in front of the village's Old Post Office.

Pictured, from left to right, are Cumberland councillors Dale Frame, Leslie Baird, Bronco Moncrief, Mayor Fred Bates, Hagen and Coun. Gwyn Sproule.

"I think most of the ground work is done. We've found the meters, I see no reason why we couldn't be moving forward in the spring."

The money comes from the Towns for Tomorrow program, a three-year \$21 million initiative to help communities with less than 15,000 people improve infrastructure.

Comox Valley MLA Stan Hagen presented the cheque to Bates on behalf of the provincial government.

"I know there's controversy over water meters," said Hagen. "But we in B.C. use more water per capita than any other place probably in the world. That's because we're spoiled."

"I've had visitors from Africa in my backyard looking at my sprinklers. They look at me and say how long do you leave that on, because their day is spent trying to figure out how they can find some water; hospitals are looking at gathering water through rain barrels so they can do operations. That's foreign to us."

While some in the community have labeled water meters as just another tax grab, Bates and Hagen both emphasized that the reason they are being installed is to conserve water.

"I truly believe that reducing consumption is at least as important as increasing capacity," said Bates. "Water is not an infinite resource, like we think it is in Canada.

"It will help us move forward with our water system and getting approvals for licences etcetera because unless you show that you're doing something to reduce consumption, they're not interested."

While demand management is one piece of the puzzle, the decommissioned Hamilton Lake Dam is something that Coun. Bronco Moncrief is eager to have rebuilt to increase the supply of water available to Cumberlanders.

"We need to go ahead to get cracking there," said Moncrief at the most recent council meeting.

"If we don't, what are we going to put through the meters, air?"

Water meters are also being considered in the rest of the Valley but grants for that project have so far not come through.

Hagen said that before provincial money would be made available for the project, the community must demonstrate that they want meters installed.

"I think that first of all they have to get the consensus of the citizens that they want to do this," he said. "Then we can look at the programs."

After receiving the provincial grant, the cost per water meter in Cumberland will be in the \$350 to \$400 range, paid through municipal taxes.

mtetrault@comoxvalleyecho.com