

Campbell River receives funding to rebuild part of the South Island Highway



By Campbell River Mirror

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“It was kind of like Christmas.”

That was the reaction from Mayor Andy Adams upon learning Campbell River will receive \$6.43 million from the provincial and federal governments to upgrade another section of the Old Island Highway.

The federal government announced Monday that Campbell River is one of 26 communities that will receive grant money through the Small Communities Fund – a joint effort between the federal and provincial governments that will provide more than \$87 million combined for 26 new infrastructure projects across B.C.

“Council is extremely pleased, as is staff, on behalf of the community,” said Adams, adding that securing the funding to make necessary improvements for pedestrian, cyclist and traffic safety, as well as expand the “beautiful” entrance into Campbell River from the south, is a “huge bonus.”

“It’s great news for the community,” said Ron Neufeld, the city’s general manager of operations and deputy city manager. “I think we’re very pleased. The work we’ve done along the highway to date has been very successful in transforming the space along the waterfront for the benefit of the community.”

With this funding injection, the city intends to rebuild the portion of the South Island Highway between roughly the Simms Creek Lift Station, north to the Big Rock Boat Ramp – a nearly one kilometre long stretch that will continue on where the previous highway upgrade through Willow Point left off.

The city will receive \$3.215 million from the federal government and \$3.215 million from the provincial government for this second phase of the South Island Highway Improvement Project.

The city is responsible for putting up \$3.215 million of its own to match the contributions from the two senior levels of government.

Neufeld said the city’s share has been accounted for in its capital plan, but is only there as a placeholder, meaning there is no timeline for when the project could begin.

“The project will require a fairly extensive design process first,” Neufeld said, adding that he’s certain construction would not begin this year.

“It’s a complete rebuild of the road,” Neufeld said. “A rebuild of all the underground infrastructure and the conversion of the overhead utilities to underground.”

Adams said the grant funding couldn't have come at a better time, as it will allow the city to upgrade its sewer and water infrastructure.

"With the expanded growth of residential in the south, it's putting pressure on our sewer capabilities and our water capabilities, so the timing of this, to do this is very much appreciated," he said.

The upgrade will also involve improvements to the Sea Walk, as well as new landscaping, to match the section of highway between Simms Creek and Hilchey that was upgraded more than five years ago.

"We've had these conceptual designs for some time, in phased blocks to be done as the money allows," Adams said. "There's seven in total, if you count Willow Point, running at one kilometre sections. We'd like to do more, but it costs money."

The second phase has been a long time coming for the city.

Council had applied previously for senior government grant funding for the next stage of highway upgrades but was unsuccessful. Council took another shot last April, after some urgency from Coun. Larry Samson.

"Our greatest asset in our community is our Sea Walk," Samson said at the time. "It's what everybody talks about, it's what everybody uses. All you have to do is drive by there, day after day, and see the people out there, whether it's raining, whether it's sunny. It is in my estimation one of our greatest assets."

Todd Stone, the B.C. minister of transportation and infrastructure, said the funding provided to Campbell River, and 25 other communities, is a huge boon, particularly to smaller communities that otherwise would not have the means to upgrade vital infrastructure.

"When public infrastructure in many of our smaller communities is in need of repair or upgrade, the high costs associated are often difficult for a community alone to bear," Stone said in a release. "However, when senior levels of government act together, we can facilitate these important infrastructure improvements and build stronger communities throughout B.C."

Adams credited the hard work of council for the city's success this time around in securing the funding.

"This council, for the last two years in a row, at UBCM (Union of B.C. Municipalities convention) lobbied Minister Stone for these highway upgrades so we're very appreciative of the minister coming through," Adams said.

City Manager Deborah Sargent said the city's success can also be attributed to the hard work of city staff in implementing plans such as the Sustainable Official Community Plan and the 10-year Financial Plan, that give the city a clear direction in future planning.

"All of these projects are possible because of the exceptional land use planning over the last few years," Sargent said. "These are documents that support all these projects so that when grants come up, we're able to capitalize on that funding."

Adams agreed, adding the city's success is a result of all the "great work done in preparation" by city staff.

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