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November update on Phase 2 upgrades to Winnipeg's north end sewage treatment plant

News

LWF

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A federal funding application for critically needed upgrades to Winnipeg's oldest and largest sewage treatment plant is finally on its way to Ottawa.

The proposal to the federal Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) seeks funding for the design and construction of new biosolids facilities at the North End Water Pollution Control Centre (NEWPCC), Phase 2 of an ongoing, multi-phase upgrade project.

Phosphorus loading from sources like undertreated sewage feeds the growth of potentially toxic algal blooms on Lake Winnipeg. If proactively designed to optimize interim phosphorus reduction, the Phase 2 project will not only increase the NEWPCC's capacity - it can also be used to finally achieve phosphorus compliance at the treatment plant.

Despite the critical importance of this project, the City of Winnipeg's Phase 2 funding application has been stalled by the provincial government since 2019, with pressure mounting to meet ICIP's Dec. 31, 2021, application deadline. On Nov. 24, Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson announced at a joint press conference with Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman that the city's ICIP proposal will now be forwarded to the federal government. Stefanson noted that the submission sends a signal that civic and provincial governments are ready to move forward together on key infrastructure projects.

Biosolids are a byproduct of wastewater treatment. Lack of biosolids capacity at NEWPCC has been identified as the primary barrier to using the interim solution - developed by LWF - to meet the plant's provincial regulatory requirement which limits phosphorus concentration in NEWPCC effluent to 1 mg/L or less.

In addition to moving forward with the federal funding ask, [Premier Stefanson indicated that the provincial government will no longer require the City of Winnipeg to pursue a private-public partnership model for the Phase 2 Biosolids Facilities](#). This requirement has been an ideological roadblock that has prolonged construction timelines and significantly increased costs.

What's next

While it's encouraging to see a new tone of cooperation between the governments of Winnipeg and Manitoba on a critical wastewater infrastructure project, our goal remains phosphorus compliance at the NEWPCC - and our governments have more to do to get there.

We're calling on the provincial government to amend NEWPCC's Environmental Act licence to ensure that the 1 mg/L phosphorus limit is met as soon as Phase 2 upgrades are complete. This could be done by explicitly requiring interim phosphorus removal be fully integrated into the design and construction of new biosolids facilities. The city and the province have so far dodged any commitment to integrate phosphorus compliance into Phase 2 design.

We are closely monitoring ongoing developments, and will continue to hold our political leaders and bureaucrats accountable for their environmental obligations to protect Lake Winnipeg.

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