

Projects will add to quality of life

While Swift Current is enjoying a surge of private sector development, projects currently underway carrying the biggest price tags are both publicly funded.

An official sod-turning ceremony took place April 22 on the most ambitious of the two projects at the site of the new Cypress Regional Hospital.

Construction on the facility began in March with a budget of \$37.6 million. The province will provide 65 per cent of the funding with the balance being raised by the City of Swift Current and participating Southwest municipalities.

"We are building a legacy for Saskatchewan's second century," provincial health minister John Nilson told the crowd at the construction site near the Swift Current Mall.

"When completed, the Cypress Regional Hospital will be the cornerstone for health care delivery in the southwest.

Cypress Regional Health Authority chairperson Dennis Lafreniere praised the strong support shown by municipal and provincial elected representatives, local businesses, health care workers and administrators and volunteer groups.

The chairperson of the Dr. Noble Irwin Regional Healthcare Foundation echoed remarks by other dignitaries, underscoring the historic nature of the start of construction.

"Today marks the beginning of a new era for Swift Current and Southwest Saskatchewan," John Meyer said.

While less glamorous, the second major publicly-funded project under construction is a new \$15 million wastewater treatment plant for Swift Current. The municipality received \$1.25 million in federal and provincial grant money for the plant, which is expected to be operational by November.

The new facility, in combination with the existing lagoon system, which will

remain a component of the City's waste water treatment process, will serve the city and its residents well into the future, said Swift Current's Director of Engineering Rob Niewenhuizen.

The plant will have the capacity to meet the needs of Swift Current even if the population swells to 25,000 people. Currently, a little more than 16,000 residents live here. There also are provisions to expand the facility to double its size should that become necessary.

When it becomes operational, the facility will solve a long-standing problem. The storage capacity of the current lagoon system is inadequate, which in the past has resulted in the city having to discharge treated effluent into the Swift Current Creek, particularly during periods of high precipitation.

The new system, said Niewenhuizen, is weather independent because it continually discharges a high quality effluent into the creek.

"The treated effluent parameters, or the criteria that we have to clean our sewage to, are so stringent that Saskatchewan Environment is allowing us to discharge into the Swift Current Creek on a continuous basis," he explained.

"We have standards in place that are almost compatible to the treatment facility that they're building in Banff, which is a federally-regulated plant and we're meeting all of the criteria set forth by federal and provincial rules," he said.

"It's a very high-tech, modern system. Basically, we found the plant that was going to produce the best quality of effluent and this system is the one that will do that."

A third major capital project involves the expansion and improvements to the Civic Centre, which includes the addition of new curling facilities.

City Council could review the latest design for the project as early as this week, said Director of Recreation and Parks Dawna Wiebe.

The architectural firm contracted to come up with the design, which was based on input from user groups, had been asked to submit a second one after the first exceeded the \$7 million budget for the project's completion.

"There's no question we want this building to be something that serves our needs years down the road, not just today," Wiebe said.

"It's going to be a big decision for Council because construction costs have increased substantially as everybody's aware. We're going to wait and see what this design comes back based on a different dollar amount that we feel that we can justifiably put forward to Council."

Soon, residents can look forward to its newest recreational facility, located in Riverdene Park.

The \$225,000 Kiwanis Skate Park, which was designed with input from young people, could be operational in August.

"I think Swift Current has to be really proud of the recreational facilities that we do have. We provide great ball diamonds. We provide great pools and this is one area that we haven't provided for. We have a lot of skateboarders in town and the youth have been asking for this for a number of years." Wiebe said.

Several other city projects also are in various stages of development, including the relocation of the Swift Current Museum, slated to be complete next year, and a renovated city hall, which will be located across the street from the new Southwest Credit Union building.

Mayor Sandy Larson said the initiatives will benefit current residents and appeal to those considering moving here.

"There has to be a balance between public-funded projects and privately-funded projects. We're seeing the privately-funded projects coming forward now, but to become a true city there has to be public-funded projects," Larson said.

"Certainly, before people move into communities, they look for healthcare, they

look for sports facilities. They look for these different kinds of things within the community and we're going to be offering them.

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