

City's 'Enerplex' logo unveiled

Coun. optimistic feds will ante up cash

DUSTIN WALKER
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

They've got a name, now all they need is more funding.

The newly titled Enerplex Committee, which has the task of digging up cash for a \$28-million Olympic-class winter sports facility being built in Fort St. John, unveiled its new logo during Monday's city council meeting.

About \$12.5 million in Olympic legacy funding was announced by the province in April for the project, with the city kicking in about \$8 million. That leaves \$7.5 million the committee hopes to secure through corporate and federal funding.

Coun. Jim Eglinski, who sits on the committee as a representative for the city, said discussions have been held with federal ministers and local MP Jay Hill about getting enough

cash to make the project a reality. The committee says it was told that the government would give them an answer within 45 days.

Despite a shaky situation at the federal level under a minority government, Eglinski remains optimistic that the feds will come up with an amount within a reasonable timeframe.

"We're hoping to have responses back from the federal government, we put a lot of pressure on them," he said, adding that other B.C. communities are also lobbying the feds for funding of their 2010 Olympic projects.

"The province wants to know these (Olympic) sites are going ahead, they want to know there is funding coming from their federal partners."

While there's no set deadline on when construction of the facility must begin,

Eglinski said the committee is working under a tight timeframe.

"It would be really nice to start construction late in the fall of 2005, or first thing in 2006 because that would slightly give us a year or two to complete (the facility) and that's pretty tight for a project of that size."

Federal funding will be the biggest contributor to the remaining \$7.5 million needed for the project, but corporate sponsorship will also hopefully aid in providing money.

And there's a possibility that a generous company could have its name attached to the soon-to-be-built sports facility.

Tony Zabinski, co-chair of the Enerplex Committee, stressed that the committee's new name won't necessarily be the name of the facility once it's built.

"This is just a name that we



Dustin Walker photo

The city's Enerplex logo was unveiled to council last night.

put to the committee, it isn't a name that the facility is going to be called," he said.

The winter sports facility will include an enclosed Olympic speed skating oval,

which will encircle an Olympic-sized hockey rink and an NHL-sized rink. There will also be moveable bleachers and seating for up to 1,000 spectators.

Have \$3 million? You could name the Enerplex

CHRISTOPHER SUN
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

With cost overruns becoming synonymous with major construction of such projects as the proposed Enerplex, one cost that seems to be fixed for now is the naming rights for the complex — a cool \$3 million.

At Monday's strategic planning meeting, city manager John Locher told council that he expects to release a report on April 10 with the final four design proposals along with word of federal funding and the actual referendum date — which is expected to be in June. But once he mentioned that the same group working on the Richmond oval would also be working on the Fort St. John one, it raised an eyebrow for one city councillor.

"As soon as you mentioned Richmond, I just shuttered," said Coun. Don Stewart. "The cost overrun on that is going right through the roof."

Locher, however, reassured council saying those cost overruns are associated with the group's unfamiliarity with the requirements of an Olympic worthy oval. Since that group is familiar now, it makes sense to go to them than to a company starting from scratch.

Coun. Lori Ackerman was also concerned with cost overruns and asked if the city will request more than the \$12.5 million that's being requested from the federal government for a contingency fund. She also added that more money should be requested because of the delay in the federal government's commitment as everything having to do with construction is constantly going up. Locher said such a fund is included in the request and that by April 1, actual costs will come in for each of the proposed designs. He's confident at least one of them will meet the city's budget.

Fort St. John's mayor, along with city staff, is preparing to meet with federal officials next week in Ottawa in the hopes of securing funding for the Enerplex.

So far, the province has given \$12.5 million to the project and the city will contribute \$9.5 million, subject to a referendum.

Locher admitted that the upkeep for the finished Enerplex complex would be high, exceeding an estimated \$250,000 a year. But some savings will be realized with the closure of some facilities once the Enerplex is operating.



Paul Frey photo

CHIPPING IN

North Peace MLA and Energy Minister Richard Neufeld (at left) handed over a cheque on Monday afternoon for \$12.5 million to Fort St. John Mayor Jim Eglinski. Neufeld gave the city the money on behalf of the provincial government, which promised the cash last year to build an indoor oval/sports facility. Eglinski was to meet later in the day with Prince George -Peace River MP Jay Hill to try and get a federal contribution to the project.



Bruce Lantz photo

Supporters of the Fort St. John Enerplex project turned out for the official ground-breaking recently, and got to play with some big toys at the same time.

CITY BEAT

YOU'VE GOT SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ENERPLEX?



The Power is Yours. Vote June 24th!

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Enerplex and what will it provide me?

Residents in the City will vote in a referendum on June 24th that would authorize the City to borrow up to \$15 million dollars to build the Enerplex. The Enerplex is a multi-use facility that will offer something for everyone in the community. The components of the Enerplex include two hockey rinks surrounded by an indoor speed skating oval. The facility will also include a year-round indoor walking/running track and a fitness centre so people of all abilities can enjoy their exercise protected from the weather. We also envision indoor tennis, soccer and track and field sports at a future date. The Enerplex will also serve the entire community as a venue for concerts, trade shows and festivals and any large community event such as our Great Canadian Welding Competition.

What will it cost to build the Enerplex and what will it add to our taxes?

We still have some important decisions to make that will affect the cost. The total construction cost could range from \$29.5 million to \$37.5 million. The impact on taxes will also depend on the amount of contributions received from the federal government and private industry sponsors. The impact on taxes is mainly related to the amount of borrowing, which at the maximum amount would add about \$12.00 a month to the average residential taxes in the City. The tax impact is forecast to decline over time as the city grows and the tax base expands.

Does this include operating and maintenance costs?

Yes, the average residential tax impact of \$11.53 per month includes an amount of \$3.67 for the incremental operating cost of the Enerplex.

Is the Province or the Federal Government contributing to this project?

We are extremely pleased to already have \$12.5 million from the Province in the bank. We are strongly pursuing funding support from the Federal Government. If the Federal Government comes through, it will allow us to reduce the amount local taxpayers will have to contribute. We are also budgeting \$3 million to be raised from individual and private sector sponsorships.

What happens if the federal Government doesn't come through?

With no federal contribution the overall construction budget would have to be scaled back by altering the building design. The maximum borrowing by the City would remain at \$15 million and the average residential tax impact would remain at \$11.53 per month.

What are the next steps if the referendum is approved by Fort St. John residents?

The next steps are to complete the building design in order to allow the first work to begin on site this fall. Tendering of building components would proceed with a construction schedule aimed at opening the Enerplex in late fall of 2007 or early 2008. The City will be seeking wide community involvement in the planning and design for the Enerplex.

What are the next steps if the referendum fails to gain approval?

The Enerplex project as envisioned would not proceed, and the City would forfeit the \$12.5 million already received from the Province. However the City must still address the urgent need to provide adequate ice surfaces for the community. The current Kids Arena would require major upgrades or a complete replacement and there is a critical need for a second hockey rink to serve adult hockey and other skaters' needs. The cost for these facilities, assuming construction of a steel building shell, is currently estimated at \$11.7 million.

What will happen to the Kids' Arena and North Peace Arena if the Enerplex is constructed?

There will be no change to the North Peace Arena, it will continue to operate as before. It is uneconomical to continue to maintain ice in the Kids' Arena. Suggestions have been to convert the facility for an indoor playground or indoor soccer pitch. While no decisions have been made on future use, it is anticipated the building structure will be maintained. We will work with the community to determine the best future use of the Kids' Arena.



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