

## Prime Minister announces \$53 billion deal in Vandorf



**By Brock Weir**

So, the name might not be too creative but Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced a "historic" 10-year infrastructure deal last week which could enable communities across the country to get those creative juices flowing.

The New Building Canada plan, which picks up where the Building Canada Plan leaves off, earmarks \$53 billion for what is billed as the largest, long-term infrastructure plan in Canadian history.

The plan includes a Community Improvement Fund, which brings Gas Tax funding into the mix, providing over \$32 billion to municipalities for roads, transit, and recreational facilities. \$14 billion will be earmarked for a specific New Building Canada Fund of \$4 billion to "support projects of national significance", and a \$10 billion pot under a Provincial-Territorial Component for projects of a local, regional, or national significance.



The Prime Minister's announcement was attended by King Mayor Steve Pellegrini and Aurora Mayor Geoffrey Dawe. Auroran photos by Brock Weir

"The new plan sets aside \$1 billion exclusively for communities with less than 100,000 people," said Mr. Harper at Thursday's announcement at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum in Vandorf, which was attended by local dignitaries including Aurora Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, King Mayor Steve Pellegrini, and Regional Chair Bill Fisch. "In addition to these funds, small communities are also eligible for some other funds, they can also apply for additional infrastructure investments through the Provincial or Territorial infrastructure component and the National Infrastructure Component as well."

"The second component of our plan is the Community Improvement Fund consisting of the incremental GST rebate for municipalities and the Gas Tax Fund. Our government has extended, doubled and indexed it and made it permanent."

According to Mr. Harper, developing infrastructure, from roads to ports, is a priority his government tackled early on in their tenure, infrastructure that Canadian families deal with and rely upon on a day to day basis. Since the launch of the first Building Canada Plan, over 43,000 infrastructure projects from coast to coast have been completed.

“Okay, the name may not be original, but the money, \$70 billion if we count our own Federal Infrastructure Investments is new,” said Mr. Harper with a laugh. “We are delighted that the framework of our New Building Canada Plan is complete and the result is provinces, territories and municipalities will now have unprecedented access to predictable, sustainable, federal infrastructure funds for a decade. This will allow those whose job it is to make infrastructure decisions to plan those decisions with assurances over the long term.

“It is our plan to help fiscally grow a stronger, more prosperous Canada.”

Mr. Harper’s announcement was music to the ears of the many Mayors, MPs, and other officials in attendance. Although they wouldn’t admit to seeing dollar signs in their eyes, they had no shortage of ideas they would like to put forward for possible funding.

“The really challenging thing from our point of view is when these projects are announced, they are very short term and if you don’t have something already on the books, then you miss out,” says Mayor Dawe. “With a 10 year window on this project, with a fixed amount of funding reserved for municipalities of 100,000 population or less, it gives us a lot better visibility and a lot more opportunity to get into that program because we can plan properly.

“If you don’t have the famous shovel-ready projects, then you haven’t really been able to take advantage of these projects. Now you can do so a little more diligently.”

Such possible projects, he said, include the Joint Operations Centre, Community Space for Youth, and the possibility of a new recreation facility in the south end of Aurora.