

Hawkesbury seeks \$1.8 million for water meters

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The town of Hawkesbury is seeking \$1.8 million from the Ontario government to cover the entire cost of installing water meters at all properties in the municipality.

The request for funding, submitted under the new Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative, was approved by town council Tuesday. February 15 is the deadline for submitting applications under the program which is designed to finance projects that are ready to build and for which preliminary studies have already been completed.

The town has already completed the required study for the meter installation, noted administrator Normand Beaulieu. The \$1.8 million price tag is based on the installation of meters that would cost \$450 each. These models would enable the municipality to remotely calculate consumption and bill consumers from a central monitoring station.

The \$450 price is an estimate, Beaulieu stressed. "If we do go ahead with the meters, we would request formal submissions."

Town council has not yet formally approved the controversial move, which was rejected by taxpayers in a 1997 plebiscite. But Glengarry-Prescott-Russell M.P.P. Jean-Marc Lalonde and Mayor Jeanne Charlebois have warned that meters are inevitable if the town is to reduce water consumption and in turn extend the life of its inadequate sewage treatment system.

Council members have stressed that taxpayers must have detailed information on costs. "If we have good information, it will be easier for us to sell our product to the people," commented Councillor Michel Beaulne.

Hawkesbury residents now pay a flat rate of \$219 per year. Based on figures in Champlain Township, where Vankleek Hill and L'Original have meters, a household could expect to pay about \$500 a year for water.

By reducing the volume of water used, Hawkesbury could increase the capacity of its Main Street sewage treatment plant by ten to 15 per cent.