

HOPES FOR FUNDING TO BRING NATURAL GAS TO NORTH SIDE OF RIVER

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The Village is making progress in its effort to get natural gas to the north side of the Rideau Canal in Merrickville. Mayor Doug Struthers received a letter from Ontario Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, Greg Rickford, and Associate Minister of Energy, Bill Walker, in December letting him know about the Government of Ontario's commitment to reduce energy costs and expand natural gas to underserved parts of the province.

The first phase of the Natural Gas Expansion Support program is being rolled out through nine expansion projects across Ontario. As part of the second phase, the ministers have written to the Ontario Energy Board (OEB), requiring them to collect information about new natural gas expansion opportunities. Successful applicants will have access to a pot of \$130 million to ensure a quick start to construction.

As part of this process, the ministers have suggested that municipalities work with their natural gas service provider to deliver the information needed to be considered by the OEB for this support. The OEB will deliver its report on eligible projects to the government by August 31, and, once this report is received, the Government will make its final decision on which projects will receive funding.

In response to the letter, CAO Doug Robertson sent a letter to Enbridge asking them to help Merrickville-Wolford put together all the necessary information to be considered by the OEB. "The limitation in accessing natural gas continues to be a constant concern in our community, both north and south of the canal," Doug writes. He also indicated that, through conversations with Enbridge's Municipal Affairs and Regional Execution departments, it has been made clear that the primary barrier for the project is the one-time infrastructure cost associated with crossing the Rideau River. Enbridge staff have indicated that the project would cost almost \$2 million.

Doug noted that the Municipality is encouraged by the Access to Natural Gas Act, 2018, which amended the Ontario Energy Board Act to provide a mechanism to financially support the expansion of natural gas distribution for projects that would otherwise be considered uneconomic under existing policies. "This describes the exact circumstances that we are facing in the Village of Merrickville-Wolford," he writes.

Mayor Struthers is hopeful that, with Enbridge's support, they will be successful in securing funding from the Province to bring natural gas to the north side of the canal. "It's a project that would protect the natural environment by getting off oil," he says. "It is a significant investment that will allow commercial and light industry properties to be more open for business."

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This article was either written by the North Grenville Times staff, or submitted to us for publication.

