

## Winkler a city of dreams: Mayor

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By Ashleigh Viveiros

Winkler is a city of entrepreneurial dreamers, Mayor Martin Harder told the Winkler and District Chamber of Commerce at its annual general meeting last week.

"One of the things we do in this city is we dream," he said. "We dream about the future. We dream about projects. And, sometimes, those projects come to fruition."

In his annual State of the City address Feb. 24, Harder discussed some of the major community projects that will reach completion in 2010 after years of planning and development, as well as several major "dreams" for Winkler's future.

Projects like the new fire hall - which the fire department moved into last month - and the Bethel Heritage Park - slated to be completed this fall - were undertaken with an eye to the future, Harder said.

"Over the course of these last almost four years, we have made a determined effort that our investments in the community at large be based on long-term investments," he said of council's strategy for choosing which major projects to pursue. "We are not frivolously spending money, as some may think. We are trying to make long-term decisions."

A project like the new water treatment plant going up north of Hwy. 14 this summer will have long-reaching effects as our city continues to grow, Harder said.

The plant, which utilizes a reverse osmosis process of water treatment that allows the city to access the previously unused brackish water in the Winkler Aquifer, will provide for the city's water needs for several decades.

"We're going to be able to provide you with a better quality of water than you have ever had before," Harder said. "(And) we will give our aquifer to our children in better shape than it was when it was given to us at the start of this term."

### Seniors housing planned

Looking further into the future, Harder unveiled several conceptual drawings for a seniors housing development proposed for 6th St.

The five-storey development would feature 73 units, including supportive housing apartments, as well as spacious common rooms, garden areas, and plenty of room for a new and improved on-site seniors centre.

The project has been two years in the making, Harder said, and only one thing is stopping it from becoming a reality.

"There's only one thing missing: money," he said, noting the city is currently looking for private and public partnerships to get the project up and running.

The city is also applying for provincial funding to help cover the costs of a feasibility study on the project, which should help council plan its next steps, Harder said.

The goal is to have the facility up and running within the next few years.

"We believe it's a vital part of our downtown development," Harder said.

### LONG 'TO-DO' LIST

Other projects on the city's to-do list for the years ahead include a public safety building to give the Winkler Police Service more room to grow, talking with Morden about developing a regional police force, building a soccer field and skate park on the undeveloped land west of 15th St., conducting feasibility studies on the

potential for a regional wastewater treatment facility, and developing plans for a major expansion of the Winkler Recreation Complex, Harder said.

Transportation also remains a key issue, he said, noting the city is still lobbying for the twinning of Hwy. 32, turning lanes off Hwy. 14 at 15th St., and lower speed limits on Hwy 14 as it passes through the city.

"We believe in the safety of our community and we have been appealing to the Department of Highways about this," Harder said of the Hwy. 14-15th St. intersection. "We will not give up on this."

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