



August 19, 2008

Dynamic duo wade into river mess

By **SUSAN SHERRING**

With the help of a concerned public, and two politically astute politicians, there's hope for the Ottawa River.

Alta Vista Coun. Peter Hume and local boy federal Environment Minister John Baird met yesterday, the second such meeting, to iron out details to get moving on cleaning up the river -- and do what they can to slow the flow of human poop going into the historic waterway.

The duo, who both recognize the public is appalled that untreated human waste is allowed to get into the river, have come up with a project they can fund together with the province -- and which can begin almost right away.

The city has been working on introducing something called real-time control, which essentially works to maximize space in the sewer system, thereby preventing the release of sewage into the river.

At yesterday's meeting on Parliament Hill, Hume proposed a \$10-million project -- to be funded three ways between the city, province and feds -- to introduce real-time controls at the Fleet St. Pumping Station.

FEDERAL CASH

"Almost every time it rains, there's an overflow there at the eastern edge of Lebreton Flats. This area is significant for two reasons. First of all, it's one of the bigger projects. And second, it's home to the national whitewater kayaking team," Hume explained.

What better project for the feds to lend their monetary power?

"Baird was very receptive to participating in that program, they're looking at it as we speak," Hume said.

For his part, Baird is excited about the project because work can begin sooner rather than later, although it still needs the green light from all three levels of government.

"We both want to make the best use of our resources, get the biggest bang for the taxpayers' buck," Baird said yesterday.

"There's so much interest focused on this as a priority. I get it everywhere I go. It's a huge source of public discussion. People are just disgusted by it."

Both Hume and Baird are downplaying suggestions Mayor Larry O'Brien has been left out of the process.

Publicly, Baird isn't biting on rumours his meetings with Hume are a snub to O'Brien.

No doubt there's bad blood between the two. Baird has worked hard to maintain a squeaky clean image over the years, and while you may not always like his politics, his reputation clearly means everything to him.

O'Brien is facing criminal charges for allegedly trying to get Terry Kilrea to drop out of the 2006 mayoral race by offering him a job with the National Parole Board. Baird is still haunted by suggestions he may have been involved.

On the record, Baird is taking the high road, dismissing any suggestion he purposefully circumvented the mayor's office and went straight to Hume on this matter.

'NOT UNCOMMON'

"I'm a local MP," he said. "Peter Hume, as chairman of the environment committee, he's sort of my counterpart, I'm just dealing with my counterpart. That's not uncommon at all."

At yesterday's meeting, there was a discussion about bringing O'Brien into the loop through Tory MP Lawrence Cannon's office, the minister in charge of the Building Canada Fund, where the sewer funding will come from.

"This, as a local issue, is huge. We need to strike while the iron is hot," Baird said. "There's a lot of enthusiasm, so let's take advantage of this when it's a public priority. This could just be a starting point."

"Talk is cheap. People want real action. They want that now."

Hume agrees.

"It seems you've got three levels of government and we're all working together and working on an issue."