

Environment ministry seeks input on port proposal

Township wants to get going on major project

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JOHNSTOWN - The multi-million dollar wharf expansion and rehabilitation project at the Port of Prescott may get started in 2010.

The Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) posted a request for a declaration order from Edwardsburgh/Cardinal Township on its web site on Thursday; the public has 45 days from that date to make comments on what the township has stated in its proposal.

The Journal was directed to the report by ministry spokesperson Kate Jordan. It indicates the project "must commence this year" in order for the wharf reconstruction to be completed by March of 2016, which is the date by which the project must be completed under the current provincial and federal funding agreements in which each pays for one-third of the project.

The ministry has not yet

said definitively to the township whether or not an environmental assessment (EA) will be required in order for the \$35-million wharf project to go ahead; work has not yet begun on the wharf reconstruction as a result.

Edwardsburgh/Cardinal received funding approval for the wharf work at the port last year. However, the work cannot begin until the MOE authorizes the project to go ahead. If the ministry requires an environmental assessment, it could hold up the project.

Edwardsburgh/Cardinal Mayor Larry Dishaw noted at Monday night's council meeting he received a letter from Environment Minister John Gerretsen last week informing him about the township's document posted on the ministry site.

While the mayor noted he is encouraged there seems to be some movement on the township's request, he also said several factors will determine whether or not the project will get under way this year. Dishaw noted if the township does not receive any opposition for

its plan for the wharf and if the MOE also does not object, then it is conceivable the project will begin before the end of the year. "There are a number of variables," he said.

Councillor Pat Sayeau added no work can be done on the wharf between March 15 and July 15 because of ministry regulations.

In the report the township prepared for the MOE, it states "The time required to prepare an individual environmental assessment (EA) would delay the construction

of the proposed new marine terminal, which may result in the continued use of the failing main wharf." The document also states "The township has already completed the engineering analysis for the Project and is prepared to proceed with the urgently needed infrastructure upgrade to avoid a potential structural failure of the existing wharf."

The report also notes impacts of the port closure would be wide-reaching and affect the economy of not only the township but much

of Eastern Ontario.

The report indicates several government agencies have been directly consulted on the project, including the Ministry of Natural Resources, South Nation Conservation, the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Industry Canada and Transport Canada. None of these agencies has expressed any issues with the project, notes the report.

After feedback has been collected by the ministry, all of the information it has received will be considered

while the ministry decides whether or not it will permit the township to go ahead with the wharf reconstruction without requiring an environmental assessment. The comment period will end on July 17.

Jordan said the ministry knows the township is "eager to start work" on the wharf reconstruction, adding it is "certainly possible" for the work to begin on the project this year. Something which will help determine this, she said, is the feedback received from the public.