

Mayor offers PM a deal: No lawsuit if you fund us

BY NICOLE MacINTYRE

Mayor Fred Eisenberger has an offer for Canada's prime minister — pay for two local projects and the city will drop its Red Hill lawsuit.

In a 30-minute meeting in Ottawa today, Eisenberger plans to ask Stephen Harper to fund \$30 million for the cleanup of Randle Reef and \$6.5 million to build a pedestrian walkway over the QEW at the foot of the Red Hill Valley Parkway.

"I think it would be a clever offset for them," said Eisenberger, noting he is hoping to capitalize on the government's recent green focus.

"Sometimes timing is everything."

But Eisenberger has already shown his hand to the government. He has promised, in the next few months, to kill the \$37 million lawsuit against the feds over delays to the controversial highway. He has been criticized for walking away from a potential windfall for the city, but says he's trying to heal wounds in the community.

The lawsuit was approved in a close vote by the previous council.

The Liberals promised \$30 million for Randle Reef last year, but there has been no confirmation from the new federal government.

Eisenberger said he has spoken with local representatives and has their support for his proposal. He acknowledged his old connections as a Tory candidate helped him secure the meeting with Harper.

Eisenberger will be in Ottawa for the Big City Mayors' Caucus, where the funding gap facing cities will be top of the agenda. A new study by the Conference Board of Canada found cities are facing a fiscal crisis and need to be made a priority at the national level. The report recommends increased investment in transportation and affordable housing and giving cities more power to tax.

Eisenberger promised to add his voice to the campaign for more support for cities, noting Hamilton desperately needs help to upgrade its failing infrastructure.

"The deficit can't continue," Eisenberger said, adding he suspects it will take time to see results out of his meeting with Harper. "I don't expect that we're going to have a great announcement at the end of the day."

nmacintyre@thespec.com

905-526-3299