Oiler talks going well, says Smith

Contributed by Journal Staff
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Talks on a new deal between Northlands and the Oilers hockey team "are going in a good direction," Mayor Bill Smith said Friday.

Smith and other members of the Northlands executive met Thursday night with Northlands general manager Al Skoreyko, who is negotiating with the Oilers' new owners for a new revenue and deficit-sharing arrangement to replace one held with former Oilers owner Peter Pocklington.

The negotiations are being watched closely by the Edmonton Drillers soccer team, which is unable to make its own arrangements for parking and concessions revenue at Skyreach Centre until the Oilers' deal is complete.

City council is also watching closely because it has agreed to pay half the $4.8-million Skyreach Centre deficit, but is withholding its money until Northlands and the Oilers come to an agreement.

Smith said negotiations over concessions and on contracts remaining from the Pocklington days are the major stumbling blocks. But he said he is encouraged by reports so far.

He said mayors of Canadian cities with NHL teams have not yet agreed on a meeting to ask for federal tax breaks to counter subsidies given by American cities to their teams.

One reason is reluctance by the mayors of Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary to take part. Smith said Toronto and Vancouver may believe their problems are different because they are in bigger markets. But "one day out of their lives is not going to hurt."