



## Building permits increase in Sask.

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The province's economic development minister says he is confident Saskatchewan's booming construction industry can increase its capacity to "meet the new demand" for construction investment within the province.

Enterprise and Innovation Minister Lyle Stewart says the province plans to work with the industry on several fronts to address pressing concerns around labour availability.

"Certainly, the construction industry has some views on attracting enough people," he said Tuesday. "I think that's their major problem. They can always get more equipment, but they need people to operate it.

"They can take on more work but they need people to do the work."

The province, through Enterprise Saskatchewan and the provincial Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour, is looking at specific immigration recruiting trade missions related to construction trades and doing more within the province to encourage young First Nations people to consider the construction trades sector.

On Tuesday, Statistics Canada reported Saskatchewan, Quebec and Ontario bucked a national trend toward declining building permit values in March. The value of non-residential permits dropped 2.4 per cent across Canada as a whole while residential permit values decreased 5.7 per cent.

In Saskatchewan, the rising numbers were bolstered mainly by residential construction, an area where March's permit total of \$94.7 million for housing was just 1.1 per cent below the provincial record of \$96 million in permit value that was taken out in December.

Statistics Canada says the robust demand for housing is being fueled by the province's "dynamic economy" and strong interprovincial migration.

The March building permit figures show Saskatoon and area saw construction activity pick up during the month compared to the first two months of the year. As a result, first-quarter construction values are close to the brisk level of early 2007.

The city census metropolitan area saw building permits totalling \$42.4 million taken out in March, an eight per cent increase over February's \$39.3 million.

January to March totals for construction permits were \$135.3 million, down 5.7 per cent from the 2007 first-quarter total of \$143.5 million.

In Regina, March was a strong month for building permits, with a total of \$51.3 million. First-quarter Regina totals have reached \$102.2 million, 52.9 per cent ahead of 2007 first-quarter numbers.

For Saskatchewan as a whole, construction activity in both residential and non-

residential categories is running ahead of last year.

The value of residential permits across the province reached \$145.6 million in March, up 29 per cent from February. First-quarter residential building permit values total \$373.8 million, 23.8 per cent above the first quarter 2007 total of \$301.9 million.

Non-residential permit value in Saskatchewan was \$50.9 million in March, 84 per cent above February totals, while first-quarter non-residential permits were valued at \$115.4 million, 2.3 per cent above the first-quarter total in 2007.

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