

Community News



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1

Markdale Hospital

In a special get-together last Monday, Lance Thurston, CEO of the Grey Bruce Health Services (GBHS), made a presentation to Municipality of Grey Highlands (MGH) about the much-anticipated new Markdale hospital.

The presentation served to bring Council up to date on the most recent developments and to address public rumours about the type of health care facility that is planned. It was also a bit of a dry run for tomorrow tonight's public meeting at Annesley United Church in Markdale.

Thurston began the presentation with some background information; recapping the back and forth between the Ministry of Health and Markdale representatives (a broad collaboration have advocated for the new hospital including GBHS administration, MP and MPP, County wardens, municipal mayors, the Centre Grey Foundation, Dr. Hamilton Hall and countless community supporters).

For instance, the story started more than seven years ago when provincial money was provided for the design of an 18 bed hospital, another later submission provided for a hospital combined with a Community Health Centre (CHC) and now finally approval for a 40,000 square foot hospital (the existing site is 36,000 square feet). This current hospital will have four beds, lab and diagnostic testing, a procedures room (not an OR) and a 24/7 emergency department. "It is now a \$50 million project," Thurston says. "Optimistically, I'd say two years before a shovel is in the ground and two years to build it."

Thurston says there are five stages to the provincial "approvals process" and Markdale is already at the second stage, because of all the work that has already been done. This second stage will see the functional design of the site drawn up to code and will specify room sizes, ambulatory care size and volume capacity. A submission to the ministry of this stage of work is expected in mid-January.

Already there have been many meetings with staff, unions, physicians and community members about the reduced number of beds and possible job losses at the new Markdale site. Thurston suggested that attrition could apply if there are job reductions and then also employees could be picked up at one of the other GBHS sites. (GBHS is the umbrella hospital corporation that manages six sites, including Southampton, Wiarton, Lion's Head, Meaford, Owen Sound and Markdale.)

Healthcare is changing, he stresses. Procedures rooms are capable of providing a broad range of services, even if it isn't a full operating room. And, often times a patient need not stay overnight after a hospital procedure. While the number of beds used to be the yardstick by which hospitals were measured, this too is changing. For example, Thurston says Meaford was designed for 75 beds and now operates 15; Owen Sound hospital was designed for 400 beds and now has 160 active beds.

There may also be specialization within the corporation in the future. For instance, cataract surgery might only be performed in Southampton and hip and knee replacements in Meaford. "GBHS will work as a system. We are moving in that direction," he says.

All of council was at the table for the presentation as were councilors-elect Cathy Little, Aakash Desai, Peggy Harris and Terry Mokriy (who is also the chair of the board of the South East Grey CHC in Markdale)

Many of the councilors and councilors-elect had comments for Thurston, many voicing concerns from the public that this was not a “real hospital.” Concerns were raised about the number of beds, layoffs and services.

Thurston reminded the council and gallery that the ministry has currently been very cooperative on this project – “they are calling us” and support is coming from the very top, “from the Minister himself.”

But he also warned, if there is too much push back from the public on beds or size or services that there could be negative repercussions, “They won’t do or say anything, but the ministry will go silent. That’s how they deal with that.”

feature photo: file photo from the Markdale Hospital site announcement, September, 2014



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About the Author



Barbara MacKay Barbara is the owner of Make Hay Communications, which publishes theFlesherton.ca Barbara worked for many years in print production and publishing, as a typographer and graphic designer, and then several years as a print and broadcast journalist. Based in Toronto, she wrote for national and international media, including Maclean’s, CBC Radio, the New York Times and the Washington Post. She holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Toronto and is a member of the Online News Association.