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# Markdale hospital project advancing

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The proposed Markdale hospital project recently received a much needed boost from the provincial government.

In a recent update to Grey Highlands council Lance Thurston, president and CEO of Grey Bruce Health Services said a meeting with the government's long-term capital planning branch last month revealed that the new hospital is now an approved capital project and that a capital budget has been allocated by the ministry.

"The capital branch is committed to getting the new hospital built. This is a significant and positive signal," said Thurston in a letter to Grey Highlands council.

Among the members of the team who attended the meeting with the capital branch were Gary Seibel, the director of facilities management, Joanne McRobert, manager of the Markdale hospital and Dr.

Hamilton Hall.

Hall, who is an orthopedic surgeon living near Markdale, has been involved in the fundraising effort and promotion of the new hospital for more than 12 years.

He said it's the first time since former health minister George Smitherman provided \$3 million in planning and design funds for the new hospital during a visit to Markdale in July 2007 that the government is taking the lead in getting the project completed. And that, he said, is a good sign.

"Never in the 12 years that I've been doing this have I had a meeting with the government which was so much proactive on their side," he said in an interview on the weekend.

The December meeting was called by the capital branch with the ministry of health and the Local Health Integration Network in attendance.

"We've finally got the political impetus behind us. This is the

first time in a decade that I feel like we're going to make this happen. It's tremendous," said an enthusiastic Hall.

Thurston said two more meetings with the capital branch officials have been set for this month with the aim of have this stage of the approval process completed within the next three months or so.

Once this stage is completed the process moves to Stage 3 of a five step process which involves drawing up blueprints.

Hall characterized the new structure as a "real hospital" with what he described as short-stay beds which allow patients to remain in the hospital for up to three days before they are moved out.

"That's not a stretcher waiting for an ambulance. The minute you are talking about three days that's a hospital room. . . I can run a surgical unit on three-day stay. Most of my surgical cases go home in three days," Hall said.

"The days of staying for three weeks in hospital are virtually gone."

He said capital branch officials had very pointed questions they need answered as they deal with details about the new hospital and concerns about integration of the hospital with other health care providers such as the Community Health Care Centre, Grey Gables -- Grey County's long term care facility in Markdale -- and other health care providers in the area.

Thurston confirmed that the reason the ministry of health approved the Markdale hospital project is that it represents an innovative model the province wants to adopt for further investment in small rural hospitals in Ontario. He too is optimistic that the project is finally getting the attention it deserves from the government.

"We moved this project along in a substantive manner through this meeting. I remain optimistic and the team is energized," he said.

Thanks

Paul