

Hospital expansion set to start in 2014

Headwaters Health Care Foundation is seeking \$2-million from Dufferin County over four years as a taxpayer contribution to the hospital's expansion of ambulatory care and the addition of an operating room, among other things.

County council has made no promises except that the requested \$500,000 annually for five years would be considered in the budget process. If approved, it would mean a little better than a one per cent increase in county tax but it's likely the county's tax bills would separate the hospital support from the county's own requirements.

The Foundation notes that Dufferin is among 12 counties and cities that have supported their hospital projects to the extent of 20% of project costs on average. Dufferin, the Foundation says in its presentation, has contributed just over \$7-million since 1988, including \$6.4-million to the 1997 building campaign.

The current \$2-million request would be part of the Commitment to Care Campaign, which has a target of \$16-million. The target was originally set at \$14 million, which presumed \$3.5 million in redevelopment, but that number has since increased to \$4 million. According to the presentation, the Foundation has raised \$12-million of the revised \$16-million since April 2011.

The targeted funds essentially are for "cutting edge" surgical and diagnostic equipment ? \$5.5-million for construction (funded largely through a provincial grant ? amount unspecified) to house the \$10.5-million for new medical equipment. The planned expansion is for 8,500 square feet plus a 4,000 square-foot redevelopment in the existing hospital for an additional operating room. The construction cost is in the order of \$14-million.

According to data cited by the Foundation, half of the 5,269 day surgeries required by Dufferin residents in 2012 were performed at Headwaters, but the other half travelled to hospitals in Brampton, Newmarket, Alliston and elsewhere.

The hospital expansion would mean that there could be more outpatient care and faster access to surgery, the Foundation says. Health Minister Deb Matthews acknowledged the need for expansion when she approved Headwaters plans.

Dufferin residents required more than 3,000 oncology visits in 2012. Roughly 80% of those went elsewhere, including to the University Health Network in downtown Toronto.

The Foundation cites the statistics in support of its assertion that there is clearly a need to expand the hospital.

To what extent do Dufferin's 57,000 residents need medical attention or some sort of surgery? The Foundation says the statistics work out to 66 hospital visits for each 100 residents.

In 2012, there were 23,740 Emergency Room visits by Dufferin residents out of a total of about 40,000, or almost 60%. In total, the hospital had about 62,000 visits of which 37,599 were by Dufferin residents.

The construction project is expected to begin in the spring of 2014.

By Wes Keller