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Medical building dream unrealized for local Veterans

Shelburne Veterans Association members will attend their June 5 weekly meeting with heavy hearts as they can't escape a view of the former Shelburne District Hospital on their way to the Royal Canadian Legion at 10 a.m.

For the past two years, that view has been of an empty building. Eleven days from today, on June 3, the vision will be of construction equipment poised to demolish the interior to make way for creation of 24 housing units, of which 10 will be ?affordable.?

The Veterans will view it with heavy hearts as, according to their two spokesmen, it represents a shattering of their long-held dream of seeing the empty building restored as a medical centre of some kind.

To that end, spokesmen Ken Mesure and John Flannery had been corresponding with Veterans Affairs Canada and others for support in a plan to create a second-floor rehab centre for a new generation of veterans suffering post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and clinic services for the public on the ground floor.

They, along with other members, had attended numerous meetings on the issue but had generally concluded that Central West LHIN along with Veterans Affairs Canada were listening with deaf ears, they said in effect.

Mr. Flannery said as many as 3,500 signed a petition in support of restoring the hospital for medical purposes. Mr. Mesure, in a current letter to editors, is asking what has happened to democracy.

?Disheartened? was the single word Mr. Flannery used to describe the reaction of his Association members when they learned last week that a $3.7-million tender had been awarded to Bertram Construction of Barrie for the conversion of the county-owned former hospital to 24 housing units plus a reserved 3,000-square foot commercial space.

When architect's fees and a contingency reserve have been added, the total budget for the conversion is about $4.5-million. Payment will be made with an $850,000 affordable housing grant from the province plus a $3.25-million, 20-year, loan and $400,000 from the county's rate stabilization fund. Development Charges of almost $2-million over 20 years will be applied to the loan.

?They were just about ready to give up,? Mr. Flannery said of the association members. However, he added, they are still hoping for some kind of medical service to occupy the remaining commercial space. As well, he said, they are continuing to purchase a Friday night lottery ticket. ?If we get rich, we'll use the money to build a centre on our own.?

They feel that $4.5-million could a better centre of new construction than what is planned for the hospital conversion.

By Wes Keller