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Opinion

Anne Jarvis: Redefining health care

From medical research to “community wellness,” this is about more than a new hospital - way more. This is about redefining health care.

Anne Jarvis • Windsor Star
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The proposed site for the new Windsor mega hospital at the corner of County Road 42 and the 9th concession is seen in Windsor on Wednesday, July 15, 2015. (TYLER BROWNBRIDGE/The Windsor Star)

From medical research to “community wellness,” this is about more than a new hospital — way more. This is about redefining health care.

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There are a lot of cogent arguments for building the 500-bed acute care hospital on a soybean field on County Road 42 at Concession 9. The site is 60 acres, providing room to expand. There are no historic buildings or natural areas to protect. It's near basic services like water, electricity and natural gas.



It has two access roads, though they'll have to be upgraded. It's also adjacent to the planned extension of Lauzon Parkway and interchange at Highway 401 and Highway 3. It's near a bus route, though service will have to improve. It can land helicopters. Finally, the city had already planned to develop the area.

But this is what's most compelling. We are getting one hospital for emergency, trauma, critical and surgical care, obstetrics, paediatrics, cardiac and cancer care for the entire city and county, 370,000 people. That population is divided almost equally, with 200,000 in the city and 170,000 in the county, as steering committee co-chairman Dave Cooke has pointed out.

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“The key was accessibility for the residents of Windsor Essex,” said Windsor Regional Hospital CEO and steering committee co-chairman David Musyj.

“With access from (county roads) 42 and 46 and the expressway and even the 401, we can be at this new site in a very short time,” said Warden Tom Bain. “This is balance.”

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Yet I wouldn't accept these arguments without the scope of services and development proposed for Windsor's core.

As I wrote Wednesday, the \$130-million satellite medical centre planned for the former Grace Hospital site on University Avenue will do more than provide essential services like urgent care and chronic disease management to the city's core. It will fill a gaping hole on a main street and is expected to become a catalyst for a neighbourhood poised for redevelopment. And it will honour an important and memorable part of our history.

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But there's a lot more. Hotel-Dieu Grace Hospital, which provides non-acute care, will return to its historic site on Ouellette Avenue near downtown, caring for the "most marginalized, disenfranchised and vulnerable populations," as CEO Janice Kaffer says.

The site, which will be rebuilt in a \$137-million transformation, will care for people suffering from mental health or substance abuse problems who don't need a hospital. Like the satellite medical centre, it will also treat chronic disease like heart disease, diabetes, asthma and arthritis.

The most intriguing part is what Kaffer calls a "community wellness" hub that could include a community centre.

"There is a great need for services beyond traditional health care," she said, referring to poverty, literacy and other socio-economic conditions. "We need to start helping people identify how to look after themselves. It's really about community wellness."

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Hotel-Dieu's Tayfour Campus on Prince Road, on the city's struggling west side, will consolidate inpatient mental health care at one location. That campus already treats children, youth and those needing specialized care. Now, 60 beds for adults will be transferred there from the Ouellette Campus. Linked to outpatient care at Ouellette, this will mean direct access to one, seamless system for assessment and treatment for children to adults. You can only really understand how significant that is if you've tried to navigate a complicated system.

The Tayfour campus, which already provides complex continuing care and rehabilitation, will also add satellite kidney dialysis for another 400 patients and expand diagnostics. All of this brings care closer to home for those on the west side.

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Finally, the city swaps the 6.5-acre former Grace site for the 14-acre Metropolitan campus of Windsor Regional in South Walkerville, with the hospital demolishing the building. This is the part Mayor Drew Dilkens is really excited about — a real deal and a blank canvas on an existing commercial corridor and in an established and desirable residential neighbourhood.

“The issue is allowing us to control development,” he said. “It will enable us to make sure any development conforms to the character of this very established neighbourhood.”

No doubt, the new hospital — and the city’s plan to develop the land near the airport — will contribute to urban sprawl. But this part is an opportunity to bolster the city’s core.

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“It provides so many opportunities it’s a no-brainer,” said Dilkens.

So you have to look at the whole \$2-billion package. There are a lot of parts, and they’re all connected.

One acute care hospital for the entire region doesn't work without satellite services in Windsor's case

One acute care hospital for the entire region doesn't work without satellite services in Windsor's core, where there is more need. And without those satellite services, expected to spur further development, placing that hospital on the city's border and allowing it to hollow out the core wouldn't be acceptable.

Neither would leaving the Metropolitan campus a hulking shell.

"Not only have we not created another Grace," boasted Musyj, "we've solved Grace."

Heck, the mayor and warden actually agree on a plan for an issue that had the potential to be bitterly divisive. And it was created with unprecedented public engagement and after nine months weighing more than 20 sites and dozens of criteria.

It would be difficult to come up with something much better.

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