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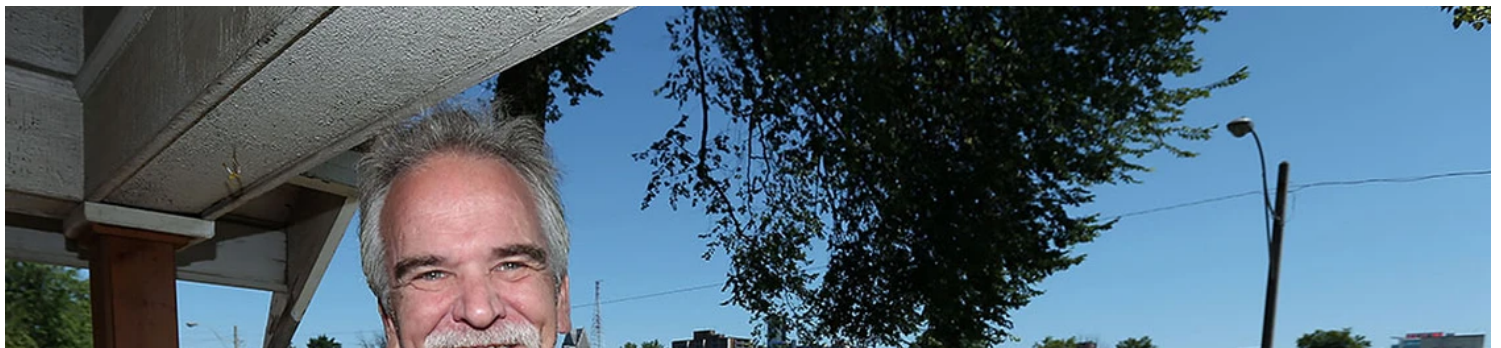
News

# Neighbours react to urgent care centre proposal for Grace site

*Andrew Mergl casts a sceptical eye on the quiet green space across from his home in the 300 block of Oak St.*

Mary Caton

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Andrew Mergl comments on the future of the Grace Hospital site in Windsor on Wednesday, July 15, 2015. (TYLER BROWNBRIDGE/The Windsor Star)

Andrew Mergl cast a skeptical eye on the quiet green space across from his home in the 300 block of Oak Street.

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The former Grace Hospital site has been tabbed for development of an ambitious urgent care centre



as part of a larger plan for a regional mega-hospital.

Full details of the leading-edge revamp of health care in Windsor and Essex County will be unveiled Thursday.

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” said Mergl, who has lived in the west-end neighbourhood since 2005. “They say one thing.... They say they’re going to rip down the hospital now and it took them 10 years to do it. Then there was a Greek community that was going to come in.”



Andrew Mergl comments on the future of the Grace Hospital site in Windsor on Wednesday, July 15, 2015. (TYLER BROWNBRIDGE/The Windsor Star)

Former Windsor mayor Eddie Francis tried unsuccessfully in 2013 to get the local community interested in developing a Greektown

at the site. He outlined plans just 11 months ago for a children's paradise, complete with rides, trails, ponds, fountains and concessions. He left the concept drawings behind at city hall when he retired from municipal politics last fall.

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The city bought the six-acre parcel in 2012 and finally levelled the defunct hospital the following year.

The hospital closed in 2004 and rapidly became a neighbourhood eyesore of busted windows and crumbling facades.

Developer Lou Vozza had grand plans

to renovate the place into a 256-bed long-term care facility but the \$30-million proposal never got off the ground.

“I’ve been enjoying the view,” said Elaine Crowley, who lives in the 300 block of Crawford. “I’ve never been able to see the bridge until they tore down the hospital. Now, I’m not going to see the (afternoon) sun again.”

Crowley has lived in her home for over three decades and worked for 20 years as a nurse at Grace Hospital.

“I sat on my porch and watched them tear the old one down

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,” she said. “Now, I’ll sit there and watch them rebuild.”

Coun. Rino Bortolin, who represents Ward 3, sees the proposed four-storey medical centre as a welcome “kickstart to development in that area. Now people can open restaurants and shops confidently. Something stable like a health-care centre will be long term. It will have a real impact on the neighbourhood. It’s a great fit.”



Elaine Crowley comments on the future of the Grace Hospital site in Windsor on Wednesday, July 15, 2015. (TYLER BROWNBRIDGE/The Windsor Star)

Ironically, restaurateur and local businessman Van Niforos announced his plans Tuesday for a new medical centre

in the 1100 block of University Avenue West.

The site of his proposed 60,000-square-foot facility for six physicians to provide urgent care and diagnostics can be seen from Crowley’s porch.

“It shocked me,” Niforos said of plans for the Grace property just down the road. “It surprised me. They knew exactly what we were doing at the hospital. There’s absolutely zero doubt in my mind that they knew.”

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After mulling it over, Niforos believes the two health-care projects “will be more complementary than anything else. I don’t see it as competition.”

Mojgan Refaei and her family moved into the area three years ago.

“I think (the urgent care centre) is a great idea,” she said. “My property is going to go up and we’re not using that (green) space anyways.”

Her mother, Minou Agah, likes the idea of having medical help right next door.

“This is a great location,” Agah said. “Many people will come to it.”

The city is swapping the Grace site for the 14-acre Met campus of Windsor Regional Hospital. The urgent care centre is slated to open before the new mega-hospital on County Road 42 and before the emergency rooms at both the Met and the Ouellette campuses of Windsor Regional close.

Niforos hopes to have his health-care facility up and running next year.

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