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News

Special levy required to cover local share of mega-hospital project

Once the excitement surrounding the announcement of the mega-hospital plans fade, the reality is this nearly \$2-billion dream will require a municipal tax increase or levy in both Windsor and Essex County.

Dave Waddell • 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 BROWNBIDGE/The Windsor Star)

Once the excitement surrounding the announcement of the mega-hospital plans

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fade, the reality is this nearly \$2-billion dream will require a municipal tax increase or levy in both Windsor and Essex County.

If the Ministry of Health approves the project, Windsor and Essex County residents are expected to foot 10 per cent of the bill. That will require raising about \$200 million locally.

“We can’t raise that type of money without a levy going to the taxpayers,” Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens said. “We’re going to have to have those discussions now. It’ll be a tough sell, but the positives of the project are so great it’ll help us sell it.”

Dilkens said no fundraising or donations campaign could generate the money needed.

Even Oakville, home to some of Canada’s wealthiest citizens, required a levy to pay its portion of the bill for a major hospital development there, he noted.

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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 BROWNBIDGE/The Windsor Star)

If the amount each municipality has to raise is based on population, Windsor and Essex County will have to contribute roughly equal amounts.

County council got a head start by approving a motion to set aside \$340,000 for the project in this year's budget.

“It won't be easy, but it will be done,” said Essex Warden Tom Bain. “Health care is ranked No. 1 and

education No. 2 by county residents. We've always contributed. I don't think the sell for this will be as tough as it looks."

The last such regionwide levy was for a Transition To Betterness Campaign that ended about three years ago.

Windsor Regional Hospital CEO and president David Musyj said marketing the merits and financing of the project is the immediate next step.

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The choice for local residents is financing the mega-hospital project or renovating the hospitals at Windsor Regional's two aging campuses, he said. The estimate for renovating the two campuses is about \$2.3 billion.

"Doing nothing isn't an option," Musyj said. "It's not choosing to build the mega-hospital or spend nothing.



The Windsor Regional Hospital MET campus is seen in Windsor on Wednesday, July 15, 2015. (TYLER BROWNBRIDGE/The Windsor Star)

“We’ve paid for new hospitals built in Oakville, Toronto, Niagara.... It’s time for the rest of Ontario to pay for a new one here.”

The province would pick up 90 per cent of the cost.

The region has seven to 10 years to raise its share of the funds, Musyj said. The money doesn’t have to be paid to the province until the new hospital is occupied.

“The (Ministry of Health) is going to watch local reaction closely,” said Musyj, who plans to begin making presentations to the area town’s councils shortly.

It will be looking for local support for the plan and the funding, he said.

“The ministry is very impressed by the level of community engagement and the process we’ve used,” Musyj said. “They think it could be a model for the rest of the province.”

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The former Grace Hospital site is seen in Windsor on Wednesday, July 15, 2015. (TYLER BROWNBRIDGE/The Windsor Star)

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