

# Oakville Beaver

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## H marks the spot

### Province handing over hospital land for a loonie

Angela Blackburn  
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Oakville's new hospital will be built on Dundas Street at Third Line.

It should open by 2013 at the earliest as construction should begin in 2010.

It will have more than the 330 beds the current 50-year-old-plus, 10-acre site hospital has.

Requests for proposals (RFPs) should go out in 2009.

Planning is already underway with the launch of community focus groups this month to gather public input, and functional programs to glean hospital department needs and projections.

And with the Province of Ontario donating the 50-acre parcel of land from the 1,095 acres of provincially-owned (Oakville Land Assembly) lands for about \$1 -- and the province's new public/private alternative funding scenario -- it will leave about 10 per cent of the cost to be raised locally.

The actual dollar cost of the hospital and details like just how many beds it will have, will be better known when the RFPs are issued, said officials.

"This is something I've worked very, very hard on. If I don't do another thing in my political life, I'm so proud to stand here today," said Oakville MPP Kevin Flynn in front of a crowd of medical, media and political observers in the Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital (OTMH) cafeteria yesterday morning.

Dubbing it great news, Halton Healthcare Services (HHS) CEO and president John Oliver thanked Flynn for his "phenomenal support" both in Oakville and Queen's Park of the Oakville effort to get a new hospital.

HHS board vice chair Mary Davies said, "The 50-acre site will allow us to expand and enhance our existing service and ensure we have the capacity to grow with our community in future years."

The new Oakville hospital has been a long time in the works and is still a long way off.

Though announcement of its funding scenario came in June 2006, and the availability of the Third Line land before that, yesterday's announcement indicated a final decision has finally been made by the hospital board and Town of Oakville, in negotiation with the Province, on where the hospital will be.

It was billed a "major milestone" in the journey.

There had been discussion that the hospital could be located on Dundas Street at Trafalgar Road and drive development of the Town's Uptown Core and Trafalgar Road corridor in north Oakville.

Flynn said that possibility was investigated, but would have resulted in a new hospital being built on a much smaller site.

Flynn announced the government's formal "intent" to transfer the land, but said though no signatures were exchanged yesterday, the transfer has received all the necessary approvals through Cabinet, legal and regulatory authorities at Queen's Park.

Typically it's up to a community to come up with the land for a hospital.

In days past, the Province would fund somewhere around 60 per cent of the building's cost, leaving the rest to community fundraising -- an amount Flynn said would be onerous for the local hospital board to raise.

Though the 50-acre site will be handed over by the Province for a symbolic \$1, Flynn estimated its "book value" at easily over \$1 million.

Finding a property on which to build a new hospital was key in plans to move forward.

Though there has been talk in the past of a hospital coming on stream sooner than 2013 -- it has been stated that by 2016 (2020 at the latest) community needs will have outgrown OTMH's Reynolds Street location -- that's likely the earliest the new hospital could open.

Currently, according to hospital spokesperson Trish Carlton, every square inch of the Reynolds Street site is being used. The existing facilities are cramped and unable to fulfill the promise of new technologies.

Flynn noted the hospital has been very creative in how it responds to its space pressures in the face of a growing population.

What's envisioned to be a state-of-the-art facility -- that should draw more doctors to Oakville and provide improved service, as well as reduced waiting times -- will offer more beds and a full range of health services including acute care, pediatrics, surgical care, mental health programs and complex continuing care.

It will serve Oakville as a community hospital, though it could draw patients from further afield.

OTMH is under the HHS umbrella along with Milton District Hospital, which is being expanded to meet growing population.

OTMH officials, and Flynn, noted the new hospital's proximity to 100 acres of provincial land being donated to the Town for park purposes and another 650-acres park called the new Glenorchy Conservation Area, should make the new hospital a pleasant place to be, whether working, receiving care or visiting.

The surroundings should support the hospital's vision of providing the highest quality of clinical patient care in an innovative environment that supports the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs.

Flynn, noting a conservation area within an urban area is rare if unheard of in North America, unveiled a map of the Third Line hospital site, saying to hospital staff it would show "just where you'll be working very soon."

Though Flynn said it seems like it's been a lengthy process, he said he's been assured the Oakville hospital plan has been quick in Queen's Park terms.

Just how much the building will cost is still unknown.

That will be better known when it is planned and a request for proposals goes out.

Flynn explained the hospital will be built according to the Province's Building a Better Tomorrow policy framework.

The hospital will be built by a successful bidder. Although the builder will likely be able to provide various services with government consent, such as landscaping, the hospital would belong to the community and at the end of a prescribed period of time (likely determined and set out in the RFP) would be turned over to the public sector.

He likened it to having a mortgage.

"Ontario's critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, will always be publicly owned, controlled and accountable," said Flynn.

The MPP noted controls are built into the policy -- which works with the Places to Grow plan and is designed to bring infrastructure on stream more rapidly -- to ensure public ownership, value for money, accountability and transparency.

Just what will happen to the Reynolds Street hospital site has still to be determined.

Though nothing has been signed or sealed, Flynn said some type of medical use would likely continue on at least part of the site.

That's what the hospital board is recommending going forward, noted Carlton.

Any redevelopment would go through the Town of Oakville's planning process and the public consultation it requires.

It's usual for government-owned land to be offered to other government agencies for a nominal rate and if there are no takers, it's put out for public sale.

Carlton said the hospital is a long way from that stage yet.

Oliver said both the planning and local fundraising to cover the local share of costs and equipment costs, will be stepped up now with a view to opening the new hospital in the west end as soon as possible.