

Oakville Today

Ian Holroyd
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Residents seek answers at hospital meeting

With \$200 million of municipal tax dollars on the line, Oakville residents are looking at the new hospital from every angle.

Approximately 200 Oakville citizens attended a public meeting at Town Hall Thursday night to get some straight answers about their forthcoming healthcare facility and most importantly, learn why the price tag is so high.

President and CEO of Halton Healthcare Services (HHS) John Oliver and CAO of the Town of Oakville Ray Green were on hand to provide background for the audience and answer any questions they had.

During Oliver's opening presentation, he clarified that the funding model, which requires a local share contribution, is not unique to Oakville, saying that all hospitals built in Ontario are subject to the same formula.

In all cases, the province is responsible for funding the majority of health-related construction, while the local share contribution is responsible for all non-eligible construction, including the cafeteria and parking garage as well as all medical equipment costs.

For Oakville's new hospital, the province asked HHS to solidify a commitment of \$530 million for the local share contribution. HHS committed \$270 million, Oakville Hospital Foundation said they are on track to meet a \$60 million target, and the Town of Oakville has been asked to make up the rest.

"The last thing in the way of us launching this project is the final commitment from the Town of Oakville of this ask of \$200 million," said Oliver. "It's an extraordinary ask and an extraordinary opportunity."

Some of the more vocal in attendance made their opinions clear early-on in the proceedings, shouting out, "It's a hell of a lot of money."

"The views, the amenities, this is the environment that other Canadians, other Ontarians are enjoying in their hospitals," continued Oliver. "We are not building the Taj Mahal, we're not building a luxury hospital. We're building a standard of care that hospitals should be built in today in Ontario."

Michelle Bilek, an Oakville resident asked the panel what would happen if Oakville residents stood up and said no to paying out the \$200 million and therefore said no to the new hospital.

"If this hospital doesn't proceed, the OTMH as we know it today continues," said Oliver. "We would go back to the drawing board."

One issue that has raised eyebrows throughout the past several months and was addressed during the meeting was the rigidity of the provincial funding model and the uncompromising requirement of the local share contribution.

“I guess my concern is...this funding model being forced down the throats of the citizens of Oakville,” said David Tremblay, a man who was born in Oakville. “You are being put in a position where you’re being told, ‘you either come up with \$200 million or you don’t get a new hospital...’ That seems to be putting a gun to the heads of the people of Oakville.

“I think that the citizens of Oakville deserve better and I hope that the Town will go to the province and tell them that.”

The local share contribution is not required to begin payment until substantial construction is completed (2014/2015). The balance can be spread out over the remaining 30 years.

Green said that on March 1, council will decide on whether or not to commit \$200 million to the hospital. He then pointed out that a future council will decide how the debt will need to be paid.