

■ **MARKDALE:** Health minister says province committed to Centre Grey replacement

Hospital

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confirmed

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DENIS LANGLOIS/THE SUN TIMES

Dr. Eric Hoskins, Ontario's minister of health and long-term care, announces to a crowd of politicians, Grey Bruce Health Services officials, media representatives and others that the Liberal government has given the green light to the construction of a new hospital in Markdale.

DENIS LANGLOIS

Sun Times staff

At long last, Markdale is getting a new hospital.

Ontario Health Minister Dr. Eric Hoskins, while acknowledging the community has been waiting "a long, long time" for this, announced Tuesday afternoon that the province has given the multi-million-dollar build the green light.

He made the long-awaited announcement in front of about 100 people at the planned site for the new Centre Grey Hospital, which is next to the Grey County-owned Grey Gables long-term care facility.

"There isn't much to see here yet. There's a nice sign. But soon, there will be a lot of activity at this site because I'm delighted to tell you that our government is moving forward with plans to construct a brand new Markdale hospital," Hoskins said to loud applause.

"As you know, the Markdale hospital is an important health care centre and employer in this area and our government wants to make sure it will continue to serve the needs of the people who live here and in neighbouring communities for many many years to come."

Hoskins, who worked as a physician in small rural Ontario hospitals before being elected to Queen's Park, said the new facility, which will replace the deteriorating 63-year-old hospital in Markdale, will offer integrated care 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It will include short-stay beds, space for doctors to do minor procedures as well as diagnostic and laboratory services.

"It will be a better and stronger hospital," he said.

"And it will remain a hospital. It

will have that blue H on it."

Detailed plans for the programs and services that will be offered at the facility are now being developed in "close consultation" with Grey Bruce Health Services and South West Local Health Integration Network officials, he said.

The province has approved spending up to \$3 million, as a

start, to support the capital planning for the project, he said.

He said he will not know how much the new hospital will cost until the design for the facility is finalized by an architect and the tender for the work is awarded to a contractor.

"It depends what the bid comes in at. There are a couple of steps

which will determine precisely what the cost is but it is a very significant investment and as a government we are committed to seeing it through," he told reporters after the announcement.

Grey Bruce Health Services CEO Lance Thurston said the most recent proposal for the new Centre Grey Hospital, presented

to the province in 2013, called for a \$50 million facility.

Hoskins said it is unclear when construction will begin, but he said he looks "forward to that first shovel in the ground and to share many more milestones" with the community.

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HOSPITAL

Community has waited for more than a decade

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"I'm as anxious as everybody else is to get that shovel in the ground as quickly as possible," he told reporters.

It has been 12 years since a fundraising campaign was launched to help GBHS build a new hospital in Markdale. The community raised \$12 million within a couple years.

In 2005, Grey County donated a piece of land for the new facility at the south end of Markdale.

A year later, the Liberal government provided the hospital corporation with a \$3 million planning and design grant to begin the process to replace the Centre Grey Hospital. Three years later, the province said the project was a priority, but not much happened over the next several years.

Meanwhile, GBHS officials and local politicians have continued to put the pressure on the province to give the project the green light.

Grey County and hospital corporation officials, along with Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Progressive Conservative MPP Bill Walker, met with Hoskins, who took over the health portfolio from Deb Matthews in June, at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference last month to again push for a commitment.

Following the meeting, Grey County Warden Brian Milne told The Sun Times that Hoskins promised the delegates that he would have an answer for them before the last leaves fall off the trees this autumn.

On Tuesday, with the crowns of many nearby trees still full of green leaves, Hoskins gave the community its wish.

"You stayed true to that promise," Thurston said during his remarks to the crowd.

Walker, who also spoke at the announcement, thanked Hoskins for his work to get the project approved. He said Tuesday was a "great day for the people of Markdale."

Walker said he and other local politicians have "pushed hard" for the project over the years.

Hoskins acknowledged that the delegation at AMO and the money raised by the community both helped to get the project the green light.

He said people in the community, including local politicians, GBHS staff and those behind the fundraising efforts, should be commended for getting the project to this point.

"It's a beautiful example of how a community project should evolve and I'm glad that now — some would say finally — we're at the stage where we're able to make that formal commitment and move as quickly as we can to begin that build," he told reporters.

Thurston said GBHS, which operates six hospital sites in Grey-Bruce, believes the new Markdale hospital "can be a model for rural health care" in Ontario.

Many other officials were on hand for Hoskins' announcement, including South West LHIN CEO Michael Barrett and chairman Jeff Low, GBHS chair Joan Homer, Grey-Bruce medical officer of health Dr. Hazel Lynn, Grey County Warden Brian Milne, Grey Highlands Mayor Wayne Fitzgerald, Chatsworth Mayor Bob Pringle, West Grey Mayor Kevin Eccles and Blue Mountains Mayor Ellen Anderson.