

Ajax-Pickering hospital should be part of Lakeridge Health, group says

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AJAX -- A citizens' group wants the Ajax-Pickering hospital to sever ties with Rouge Valley and join Lakeridge Health instead.

Michael Gainer of the Friends of the Ajax-Pickering hospital spoke to Pickering council March 21 and gained unanimous support for a plan that's been in the works for a number of years.

Ward 1 Regional Councillor Jennifer O'Connell introduced a motion that council support the Friends' request that the Central East Local Health Integration Network explore the possibility of a single hospital corporation for all of Durham Region.

That would mean the Ajax-Pickering hospital severs ties with the Rouge Valley Health System and joins the Lakeridge Health Corporation.

The former Ajax and Pickering General Hospital joined Centenary Hospital and became part of the Rouge Valley Health System in 1999. The Ontario government created the Health Services Restructuring Commission in 1996, with a four-year mandate to restructure Ontario's hospitals. Ajax was one of the hospitals to avoid closure and amalgamated instead.

"Friends of the Ajax-Pickering Hospital have long felt that our hospital has played a very important role in the community but has not always had the support that is needed by the Rouge Valley hospital corporation," Mr. Gainer said.

Neither Rouge Valley nor Lakeridge would comment on the matter.

The motion noted Durham's population is projected to grow at more than twice the rate of any other community within the Central East LHIN, and residents will expect a broad range of medical services close by. It also said a Durham Region focus will improve fundraising from all three government resources in Durham.

"When we're competing for the political powers that be, it can be easy for the Ajax-Pickering hospital not to get its fair share," Coun. O'Connell said.

Mr. Gainer said in an interview afterward that the big push for this idea came in 2008.

"The baseline of it was the mental health crisis," he said.

Rouge Valley moved its mental health inpatient unit to the Centenary campus after a peer review found the hospital system was in severe debt. The move caused an uproar in the Ajax-Pickering community. There was a similar situation in 2005 when Rouge Valley considered moving the Ajax obstetrical and pediatric services to Centenary.

LHIN spokeswoman Katie Cronin-Wood said the LHIN's goal is to create an integrated system of care, and it's not determined by which buildings the hospitals have, but how the service providers work together as a system.

"The goal is that the local residents ...have the most timely access to the services they need, regardless of the name or governance of the organization," Ms. Cronin-Wood said.

She noted services in Durham and within the LHIN are improving already, and said Rouge Valley and

Lakeridge Health have a strong partnership among themselves and other hospital organizations. She said

Lakeridge Health Oshawa being designated as a stroke centre for the area is one of many ways services have been integrated among Central East LHIN hospitals in the past five years.

Aside from Pickering council, the Friends has received support from the Town of Ajax, the Township of Uxbridge and the City of Oshawa. The Friends will next seek the Region of Durham's support before making a formal proposal to the LHIN.

Ms. Cronin-Wood said the conversation on this matter would be between the respective hospital boards. The LHIN would most likely become involved in talks if the boards were to consider the idea, but ultimately, the decision will come down to the minister of health and long-term care.