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#WEareready ... #WEwereheard...#WERMovingForward!

I still recall the day in 2012 when Dwight Duncan - then Deputy Premier and Minister of Finance - and I discussed the two infrastructure plans that were before the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care from Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital and Windsor Regional Hospital ... and how to move them forward.

Both plans were well intentioned but very expensive and not coordinated. Only one resulted in modern, state-of-the-art infrastructure but without the concentration or critical mass of hospital healthcare services that would service our region for generations to come.

We brainstormed different ideas on how to move forward and the concept of one state-of-the-art acute care hospital for the region was discussed. We recognized we would have to get feedback from the community and experts on the concept.

That resulted in the creation of a task force in the spring of 2012 to engage the community on the viability of the idea of a new single site state-of-the-art acute care hospital. The task force was chaired by Dave Cooke, Teresa Piruzza and Tom Porter.

The results were overwhelming overwhelming support for the move to one, state-of-the-art acute care hospital.

This required a hospital governance change. Leaders stepped forward and realigned hospital healthcare services with WRH being responsible for all acute and HDGH for sub acute before the ministry even asked that it be done. In fact the Ministry was made aware of the changes as their letter requiring them was being delivered to each hospital. Thank you Hôtel-Dieu and Janice Kaffer for being a valued partner as we move forward.

For the past 5 years we have worked as a program and services steering committee that included representation from CCAC, Essex County Medical Society, Leamington District Memorial Hospital, Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare, Windsor Regional, the LHIN and City and the County. We listened to our community and region. In fact, we had a site selection committee made up entirely of volunteers, feedback from 600 members of the community on what criteria we should use, and more than 60 community engagement sessions engaging with thousands of Windsor-Essex residents about the planning and project itself.

Face to face, TV, radio ... You name it, we attended and dialogued with our community. We created a rather aggressive social media outreach approach and allowed our region to view what was happening in healthcare infrastructure across North America without leaving their living room – being able to view it all on line. During all of this, we were asked by the Ministry of Health to document our process and have since been contacted by six Ontario healthcare organizations asking us for more information on how we did it.

From the start, we stated we were positive there was going to be one result we could be sure of out of all of this – that we would not make everyone happy. With a decision of this magnitude and the size of the region, we knew that was impossible. Also, human nature does not create a world where there is ever universal agreement. If you live in such a world – please invite me – I would like to experience that for a few seconds.

However, I was bred, born, raised and live in this region. In my 50 years in this region I have never heard or witnessed a decision of this magnitude with such overwhelming support. Also, of all political stripes.

We also said up to this point that we are in the "if" and "when" phase ... “if” we will have a project and “when” will it be built.



Well folks, the "if" is gone.

This is happening.

This is now a reality. We told them #weareready ... and we were heard.

I have to thank the city and county leadership. It takes true leaders to stick their necks out. Mayor Dilkens and Warden Bain did just that. Our City Councillors and County Councillors and mayors did just that.

God gave us necks for a reason. We have to stick them out every so often.

The residents of Windsor/Essex sent a massive message to the province by supporting the levy. I said it before and will repeat it: when we told the Ministry we had the levy secured, that was a game changer.

I also need to thank our local MPPs, Percy Hatfield, Lisa Gretzky and Taras Natyshak. They could have easily turned this into a political issue and made hay with it in the legislature. They did not. Folks you have no idea how often they reached out to update us on their masterful discussions with the government on making this plan a reality. They did it professionally and behind the scenes. This is very similar to the work Dwight Duncan himself did behind the scenes that resulted in the Schulich Medicine and Dentistry school, Windsor campus with the Conservative government.

To our Hospital and Foundation Board of Directors and all the ambassadors in the room: thank you. You have been with us all the way and spent hours and hours being the faces and voices of this project. You have spread the word across the region and helped with the community engagement. You played a large part in the “unprecedented” description and your voices were heard.

To our front line employees, professional staff and volunteers – you are what make this place tick. You have been involved in the planning to get this this point and are going to be directly involved in the planning moving forward. We are going to make sure we have state-of-the-art facilities that surround and support the outstanding work you do for our patients currently.

The current liberal government: ‘Thank you’. You could have ignored us and spent the monies elsewhere. There are many priorities across the Province. You did not.

Premiere Wynne and Minister Hoskins, you stated a few years ago “you would not forget about Windsor, not by any stretch”. You definitely kept your word. Thank you.

The real work begins now. The work ahead is about 10 times more challenging than what we have done so far.



For those that do not support this project or wanted a different location for the new acute care hospital, I appreciate your passion. However, as stated, we cannot make everyone happy. Making you happy would only upset others.

We need everyone from our region to be a part of the planning and design. Again, to those who have not been supportive to date, your help is needed too. Be a part of the positive changes and leave your imprint by having ideas that become a part of the final products for our region and your children and grandchildren to benefit from. It is time to come together and make positive change. I know the Windsor Regional Hospital medical/dental/mid wifery staff, employees and volunteers are excited to be part of planning for our future. The number of individuals that have been involved to date in the planning and those that have stepped forward to be involved is impressive. Thanks to all of you who are here today to celebrate. In addition, along with the presence of the medical school, the other top item recruits want is to become part of Windsor Regional Hospital and to be part of the planning for generations to come. Our future looks bright.

One person who I would be remiss to mention is someone that took care of his parents at his home for years. During that time he lost his mom. During that time he never missed a community event and was engaged daily on moving this project forward. He volunteered his time. Thousands of hours. At the end of all this I have learned a lot from him and gained a friend for life. I can tell you we had some great political debates and discussions that I will value forever; however, I can tell you we agreed 100% on this project from the start.

Dave Cooke - thank you for everything you do and everything you will do moving forward. I look forward to working with you as planning proceeds forward.

What is next? A heck of a lot of work. However... fun work. We get to - together - design a hospital healthcare system for our region for generations to come.

There will be ups and downs along the way. It will take time and a lot of hard work. People always ask – why does this take so long. It is because there is a lot of detailed planning to be undertaken. The ten years we take today will pay dividends for generations to come.

I think the odds in Vegas of what is going to get done first - the new acute hospital or the bridge - have just changed and tilted a bit in our favour. No matter which one gets done first, just think about it Windsor/Essex - combined these projects represent billions of dollars of investment in our region in the next 10 years.



We will have more to say about the next steps over the next few days and weeks. However, today is a day to sit back and pat yourselves on the back. Well done all of you. You made this happen.

One thing we have talked about is now we have to update our slogan of #weareready.

Now we have to update that sign.

Join me in saying

We were heard

Better yet....Get 'er Done

