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COMMUNITY

Windsor megahospital site selection defended after release of documents

By **Tom Morrison** OurWindsor.Ca

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Members of the committee responsible for **selecting the proposed site** for Windsor and Essex County's proposed single site acute care hospital are defending the selection process following a lawsuit and the release of new documents.

The owners of the property which placed second in the selection process have filed a \$10 million lawsuit against Windsor Regional Hospital and the owners of the selected site.

New documents released through a freedom of information request identify the second place property as vacant lands east of Jefferson Road on Tecumseh Road East in Windsor. The 77-acre property covers six street addresses behind the Home Depot on Tecumseh Road East.

The lawsuit was filed by GEM Properties Inc., which submitted the site application and is one of six owners or interested parties included in the submission.

The eventual selected property, announced in July, is located on Michael O'Keefe Farms at the southeast corner of County Road 42 and Concession Road 9 and covers 60 acres.

As explained during a Thursday news conference, the selection process was broken into two phases. Phase 1 involved a scoring of the 22 submitted properties based on criteria which had been weighted based on the results of public and professional consultation.

The site selection subcommittee could have chosen up to five sites to move to Phase 2, but decided only the top two sites – the GEM and O'Keefe locations – would proceed.

The GEM site beat the O'Keefe site in Phase 1 on a score of 904 to 860. Of the 32 different criteria, GEM scored higher in 13, O'Keefe scored higher in 9 and the two tied in 10.

Phase 2, which was weighted at 30 per cent to Phase 1's 70 per cent, rated the two sites based on the cost of purchasing the land as well as an added price determined by both the potential seller and planning consultant firm Stantec Consulting Ltd.

Each site was assessed on a base of 50 acres. GEM offered its land for \$136,000 per acre, while the successful site offered \$100,000 per acre.

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Drazen Bulat, a partner with law firm Miller Thomson LLP, which helped design the site selection process, said both applicants were given examples of how a higher price could affect their final score.

The added price to the 50-acre amount was based on costs related to environmental issues, archeological issues, site servicing issues, zoning or rezoning and environmental impact segment, said Bulat.

It was determined the O'Keefe site would have additional costs of \$1,137,500, while the GEM property would have \$925,400 extra.

When the 50-acre cost and additional cost are calculated, the O'Keefe site comes in at \$1,589,900 less than the GEM property.

Based on this information, the committee scored the County Road 42 property at 445 in Phase 2, while the Tecumseh Road property received 354.

The final scores put the successful site at 1,305 and the second placer at 1,258, a difference of 47 points.

"We believe it was an amazing process and it was conducted by amazing people who really care for this community and the site selection

committee. “This was the most detailed process in selecting a site that anybody in the Ministry has ever heard of before.”

The documents revealing the other proposed sites resulted from a freedom of information request from a member of Citizens for an Accountable Megahospital Planning Process, which has argued the new hospital should be located within or near Windsor’s core.

CAMPP spokesperson Philpa von Ziegenweidt said the second place property is still not ideal, but it’s better than what was chosen.

“Obviously cost is an issue, but if you look at that in the context of the entire price – the \$2 billion price tag – it’s almost nothing,” she said.

Glen Ackerley, a construction lawyer for WeirFoulds LLP who acted as the fairness advisor for the project, said the rules were clear to all involved and following them is what led to the decision.

“You set the rules they way they are and at the end of the process, there’s a result and looking back you realize that result is justified based on the rules that are set in terms of 70 per cent technical and 30 per cent on price in this case,” he said.

The proposed new hospital, which would be managed by Windsor Regional Hospital, is part of an estimated \$2 billion upgrade to Windsor and Essex County’s healthcare system.

A decision on whether or not the plan will move forward is expected this year, healthcare officials said in July.

Windsor Regional Hospital CEO David Musyj said he’s “confident” the lawsuit will not affect the timeline.

“Let me put it this way: if the second proponent thinks that by issuing a lawsuit that somehow they’re going to become the first proponent and they are going to go ahead with the project, they’re dreaming in Technicolor,” he said.

Tom Morrison is a Windsor-based journalist.

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