

# WDGPH New Guelph Health Unit Open House !



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**Health unit shows off plans for new home**

*By Jessica Lovell Guelph Tribune*

As with any other real estate deal, a key selling feature of the local health unit's new multi-million-dollar facility is location, location, location. Recent headaches caused to Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health by the changes to city bus service have highlighted just how much better the new location will be, said local medical officer of health Dr. Nicola Mercer. "I think it's going to be fantastic in the new location, because it's a more central location, served by many buses," she said following a public open house to share plans for the new facility with the community.

In about two years, the health unit plans to move from its temporary digs on Southgate Drive, in a primarily industrial area of the city, to a brand new, 50,000-sq.-ft., Purpose-built facility on University of Guelph land just north of Stone Road. And it seems the move can't come soon enough. The changes to the bus service have forced the health unit to issue taxi vouchers to get people to and from some of its clinics.

"It primarily affects the TB clinic," said Janice Walters, control of infectious diseases program manager. The TB clinic runs Monday afternoons between 2 and 6 p.m., servicing a wide variety of people, including students, seniors and newcomers to Canada, who are being treated for TB or who may have been exposed to TB.

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*Tribune photo by Jessica Lovell - Architects William Curtis (left) and Paul Sapounzi of +VG Architects were on hand at a public open house Thursday to share preliminary plans for a new public health facility.*



Many are “of a socio-economic status that they do not own cars,” said Walters. Currently, the health unit shuttle – Guelph Transit’s solution to the problem of getting people to the facility during times when its Route 21 industrial bus does not run – does not run on Monday evenings.

“If people are leaving an appointment at 5:15 p.m., they would have to wait until 8 p.m. to get a bus,” said Walters. “Even when they can come to our clinic with the health unit shuttle, (for some) it’s a matter of transferring buses several times.”

Over the next few months, the health unit will be keeping track of additional expenses, such as taxi vouchers, created by the problem, and will be trying to gauge how many clients are affected, she said. In the meantime, the health unit has begun planning for its new facility with hopes of breaking ground in July.

At an open house at the Best Western hotel on Thursday evening, public health and +VG Architects revealed preliminary concept plans for a building to be located on Chancellors Way. The elevation drawings on display showed a three-storey building about three times the size of Paisley Road school, said architect Paul Sapounzi. He stressed that the drawings represented only preliminary ideas, rather than finalized plans.

The goal with the final design would be something timeless in terms of its looks, and serving the health unit’s needs, including accessibility, he said. “Accessibility is going to be really important in this building,” he said.

The location will contribute significantly to its accessibility, Mercer said during the open house. She noted its location is central to a much more populated area of the city than the current health unit of office, and is near the university and the government buildings on Stone Road. “I think it’s an excellent location next to the partners it makes sense for us to be near,” she said.

Her hope for the building is that it will serve the needs of the community for the next 50 years, with the option of expanding should the need arise in the future. Also, “it’s going to be a health care facility, so it has to be practical, and organized, and efficient,” she said.

The building will house a staff of about 150, said Mercer. It will also provide clinical space and programming space for things such as prenatal classes, dental health clinics and sexual health clinics. “One of the challenges right now is that we have zero capacity,” she said.

Such programs are currently run out of other locations, but not having to rent space in other buildings could be more cost-effective, she said. And of course, the area is also better served by the bus system, which has multiple routes with stops as close as the corner of Edinburgh and Stone roads.

But Mercer is hoping that once the new health unit is built, at least one bus will drive right through the Chancellors Way loop and maybe even stop in front of its door.



**+VG Architects** is a full-service architectural firm offering new design, expansions and heritage restorations for cultural, educational, municipal, justice, healthcare, residential and recreational facilities. Our staff of 50+ operates in five offices in Ontario, in Brantford, Kitchener, Toronto, London and Belleville. See [www.plusvg.com](http://www.plusvg.com) for more information.