

Letters to the Editor, Ottawa Citizen, March 11, 2016, p. A9

<http://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/letters/your-letters-for-friday-march-11-the-lord-elgin-the-conservative-mind-preserving-farmland>

Will Civic serve the community decades from now?

The debate over whether the Civic Campus of the Ottawa Hospital should be allowed to expand into the Central Experimental Farm is premature and distracting us from dealing with some more important questions: What types of health care facilities do we need in the Ottawa region? And: Where should these be located in the region?

The city of Ottawa has changed tremendously over the past 25 years: Population growth has been outside the Greenbelt, in the west, in the east and especially in the south. The population is aging. People are living longer. The number of people living with physical and cognitive disabilities is increasing absolutely and as a proportion of the overall population. We know that we cannot afford what we are doing now, let alone new pressures, without real change.

In this context, I see the spending of large sums of money on the expansion of the Civic Campus as fiscally irresponsible if due diligence is not done to assess how that spending moves us towards optimizing health care in the region 25 years from now.

If the expansion of the Civic campus fits into a long-term vision and is deemed to be the most urgent/important thing to do at this point, then so be it. But do you really believe that the current campus, opened in 1924 on the outskirts of the city at the time, is the best location to serve the citizens of the region – both as we are today and will be in 25 years?

Jerry Fiori, Nepean

Why not consider LeBreton Flats?

I would like to see an assessment of LeBreton Flats as a site for the new Civic Hospital. This would save the Experimental Farm land, not involve the Senators moving from Kanata, and allow the existing hospital to be used for affordable living units.

Roger Stacey, Ottawa

That farmland isn't 'empty'

Shame on the minister of agriculture and senior staff for not finding the time (or courage?) to strongly defend the land of Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm by explaining its true value.

That "empty" land of the farm contains a huge wealth of knowledge which we need in order to successfully grow food crops in a changing climate. During the 130 years since the "Act Respecting Experimental Stations" came into force in Canada, untold millions of taxpayer dollars and many thousands of "person years" of physical and mental work were invested there, in order to find out how crop plants respond to changes in soils, weather or climate, to fertilizers, to plant diseases, and to many other factors.

Those 130 years worth of accumulated detailed knowledge are the "base line" which can help us know how crops respond to changes in their environment, or to attacks by plant diseases, and how to develop better and more disease-resistant strains of crop plants. That can best be done by comparing crop performances on the same plots of land on which earlier crops were developed, because it avoids many unknown factors which might affect test crops elsewhere.

The Ottawa Hospital does need to expand, but not necessarily on land that is truly priceless, because it cannot simply be replaced by some other patch of Earth.

Dieter Riedel, Ottawa, M.Sc., PhD.