

I am writing to offer a rebuttal to the points made in the input provided by Mr. Poilievre to the National Capital Commission's (NCC) Ottawa Hospital Site Review, which was published in The Ottawa Citizen on October 4.

Mr. Poilievre affirms that when then-minister John Baird and Ottawa Hospital CEO Jack Kitts announced in November 2014 that the new Civic campus would be built on the Central Experimental Farm, it was as the result of seven years of talks and an expert panel's consideration of 12 sites. The responses obtained from the Ottawa Hospital to Access to Information requests submitted by the Coalition to Protect the Farm show that no new work was performed by the hospital or its consultants between 2007 and 2014 and that the 2014 announcement was based on the same rationale used in 2007 for selecting Field #1 on the Central Experimental Farm. Very little documentation exists beyond a one page summary evaluation table in which the CEF site and the Woodroffe and Hunt Club site are tied on points.

Everyone agrees that there is a need for a new hospital. The disagreement arises as to where to situate it. The NCC process for determining this has, in contrast to the previous exercise, been transparent, taking into account a reasonable balance of federal, municipal and hospital needs and objectives, and making the process open to public input. The previous government should have listened more carefully not only to the hospital's needs but to the legitimate needs of the other actors in this process. It is a reasonable accommodation for the hospital to make, given that it is seeking some of the most valuable real estate in the capital from the federal government, free of charge.

It would seem in the circumstances that the federal government is entirely within its rights to first consider which lands it is willing to make available for the purpose of building a new hospital, and then for the hospital to determine whether any of these parcels suit its needs. It would be prudent and fiscally responsible for the federal government to start with lands that are currently surplus to its requirements. This brings us to the Booth Street site, parts of which have already been declared surplus and are now actively being marketed by the federal government, and all of which is slated for eventual disposition. This site is located close to the University of Ottawa's Heart Institute, offers close, quick access to Highway 417 and is also close to the Royal Ottawa Hospital. As a bonus, it is within 400 meters of the Trillium line, the north-south axis of the city's rail rapid transit system (which neither the current Civic site, nor the Farm site across the street will ever be).

While the hospital has asked, and is still asking for, 50 to 60 acres of land, surely a centrally located 25 acre parcel, free of charge, should not be overlooked. Many brand new 21st century hospitals have been built or are planned on much smaller footprints (for quick reference, see the Glen campus of the McGill University Health Centre in Montreal, the Humber River Hospital in Toronto, St Paul's Hospital in Vancouver).

As Mr Poilievre points out, “we are building a G7 nation’s capital, and it will require a vision that serves current and future residents well into the next century”. We wholeheartedly agree and believe that in doing so we should build it in such a way as to respond to the greatest challenge facing the 21st century, climate change. The new hospital could be a world class showcase for responsible design that is sensitive to this new imperative. In our view, you don’t do that by destroying 60 acres of unique greenspace, on the Farm or elsewhere, and putting up an expansive low rise, surrounded by even more expansive surface parking.

The Central Experimental Farm is not sacrosanct. But it is an invaluable, and irreplaceable, scientific, heritage and greenspace asset that makes Ottawa a unique G7 capital, with one thousand acres of greenspace in the core of the city. But it is under constant development pressure, and once destroyed, it can never be recreated. This is not the case for hospitals. Over the course of its history, Ottawa has seen many hospitals built, replaced and repurposed, and will continue to do so in the future as it grows. The dynamic regeneration of facilities is part of the normal, incremental evolution of the health care system in a major metropolitan area.

Mr. Poilievre keeps repeating that there is no information on what research is conducted on the farm. For the benefit of those who still have questions about this, the Coalition to Protect the Farm has produced, and submitted to the NCC, a 10 page summary drawn from public sources on various Government of Canada websites. It can be found here: <http://greenspace-alliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Research-on-the-CEF-rationale-FINAL.pdf>

One of the main sources for this information is Agriculture and AgriFood Canada’s 2016-17 Report on Plans and Priorities, which is a standard budgeting report produced by federal departments. These reports lay out forward looking plans and budgets for three year time slices, updated every year. It is the basis on which departmental budgets are approved, also in three year slices. This is why the report by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, referenced in Mr. Poilievre’s letter, speaks of projects ending in 2017, or 2018. These are in fact longer term research projects, but budgets are only approved out to 2018, as is the case for all government funded activities. In addition, the Commissioner’s report only deals with research projects touching on environmental and climate change issues. This is only one part of the CEF’s research activity, which encompasses a great deal more straight agricultural research of great benefit to Canadian agriculture.

To provide an outsider’s impartial view of the long term nature of this type of research, and the great cost of moving it elsewhere, here is an excerpt from a recent letter from Dr. Warren Dick, an agricultural researcher at Ohio State University (written in response to the current NCC public consultation process and made available by the author to the Coalition to Protect the Farm).

“I am a scientist at The Ohio State University with extensive experience in research, teaching and international agriculture. I also managed some long-term no-tillage and crop rotation plots in Ohio for 30 years. These sites have been invaluable in helping assess things like the impact of climate change on agricultural production and soil quality. In fact they were a major component of a \$20 million plus research project, funded by the US Department of Agriculture, that has just been completed.

A site like the Central Experimental Farm, with its own long-term and other important research plots and emphasis, cannot simply be picked up and moved to another site without

losing extremely valuable information that accumulates over years. Research that is conducted on the same plots for many years is invaluable. I sincerely hope that this great investment that Canada has made at the Central Experimental Farm is not compromised due to other competing interests that can be met at other sites much easier than moving the Central Experimental Farm to another site.

There is no need to pit the benefits of the Central Experimental Farm against the benefits of a new hospital. In any event, they are incommensurate, apples and oranges. We need, and deserve both. Nothing less would befit the great capital we are now and the greater capital we aspire to become.

Sincerely,

Paul Johanis

A member of the Coalition to Protect the Farm