

Take time to get hospital right

The National Capital Commission is taking its time to decide where an expansion of the Ottawa Hospital's Civic campus should be located.

It's a decision worth waiting for. Better a good decision than a quick one we live to regret.

The first attempt was ham-fisted, and would have cut away land from the Central Experimental Farm. The public had no real say in the matter, and former MP John Baird – the local liaison with the NCC – seemed content to ignore those voices.

The location was convenient but the farm is cherished by many people – some who live nearby and some from far away.

This was not a case of NIMBY-ism.

Farm supporters know the thin end a wedge when they see one. If part of the farm could be sliced away for the hospital expansion, another “good cause” could come along anytime, and the farm could eventually be sacrificed, field by field.

The NCC is now re-investigating preferred sites for the Civic expansion, including a list of 12 sites pinpointed back in 2008. A recommen-

dation is expected in November.

While it would be nice to have a quick decision, getting it right is crucial. What is eventually constructed will stand for decades; a poor, rushed decision about its location must be avoided.

Proximity to the existing Civic campus would be nice but should not limit the decision makers.

The Civic is but one campus managed by the Ottawa Hospital. If a new campus is created – distant from the Civic – there will be no need to add layers of management. The new building(s) and all the existing campuses will be operated by the same management team.

A new site brings new opportunities. Existing departments at the other campuses that desperately need more space could be moved to the new property, and that in turn could free up space in existing buildings. Demand never goes down, only up.

There are growing, global medical challenges the Ottawa Hospital could address through expansion – potentially benefiting people around the world. And people here in Ottawa.

But only if we get it right.