

# Council votes to waive fees on medical building

By [Cecilia Nasmith](#), Northumberland Today  
Tuesday, December 1, 2015 9:29:32 EST AM

COBOURG - A recorded vote of five-to-two determined Cobourg Council's support for waiving fees for the new medical arts building that will stand immediately east of Northumberland Hills Hospital and (it is hoped) provide a revenue stream for the financially strapped institution.

Three options were presented at this week's committee of the whole meeting: one was to waive \$237,048 in development charges, \$63,548 in building-permit fees and \$3,056 in plumbing-permit fees; one was to offer a partial waiver; and one was to deny the request entirely.

Subsequent debate uncovered support for all three options among councillors though, in the end, Deputy Mayor John Henderson's motion to go for a full waiver saw only Councillors Brian Darling and Larry Sherwin voting against.

"In the spirit of openness, fairness and transparency, it is my opinion the building should stand on its own merit," Darling said.

Several councillors noted that the value of the gift may affect the town's ability to support other health-related initiatives, such as their annual support of the West Northumberland Physician Recruitment and Retention Committee and the annual \$100,000 toward a previous \$300,000 commitment to the hospital for heart-monitoring equipment.

Mayor Gil Brocanier listed other reasons the waiver might not be a good idea in the short term: the potential for vacancies with lost revenues and taxes to the town, the hit to the development-charges reserve, the loss of a total of \$303,652 in revenue, the potential for the decision to be challenged.

"If there is one thing I have learned in my political career, it is the passion people have for the hospital and the services it provides," Brocanier added.

He also believes the building would be an asset in attracting physicians at a time when six of them already practicing are on the verge of retiring.

"This is what new physicians are looking for," the mayor said.

"They don't want to start a business. They want to come in and have a turn-key operation.

"Even if we have to forgo contributions to the capital equipment, it is the right thing to do."

Councillor Debra McCarthy addressed criticism that the financial breaks would only benefit the corporation behind the project, Northumberland Medical Arts Inc.

"Indeed it is a non-profit corporation which, for me, is a very different entity," McCarthy said.

"There has been a perception in the community that this is money in the pockets of an elite medical fraternity. In my mind, nothing could be further from the truth.

"Already, a great deal of risk has been taken personally by members of this group," she added, noting that they had already raised \$3.5 million among them.

This is the minimum on which they could debenture the remainder.

"In other words, community-minded individuals saw the importance of this project and agreed to provide promissory notes," she said.

As for the risk of vacancies, she added, its space is already 93% leased.

"I believe this is a very, very important project, and I personally support 100% waiving the fees. If it affect our levels of donation to the (hospital) foundation, so be it."

Brocanier pointed out that the hospital foundation's new campaign aims to raise \$12 million over 10 years. A few years down the road, he said, perhaps the Town could help.

Councillor Forrest Rowden pointed out that the construction process would mean \$10 million in spin-off benefits to the local community in terms of jobs and local spending in stores and restaurants.

Rowden argued for support of the middle option, the partial waiver.

"At least we will show good faith in this project," he said.

In the end, Henderson said in selecting the first option to put to a vote, he had to go with the passion.

He was joined in his vote of support by Brocanier, McCarthy, Rowden and Councillor Theresa Rickerby.