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Hospitals prepared to oppose new housing

FROM PAGE 1

Frank Lussing

While York Region hospitals have been forced to tighten their belts to cope with growth, he said other communities have been unaffected.

"On a personal level, I am completely outraged," Lussing said Friday, adding there is a "profound injustice in the way hospitals are being funded."

"We're among the most efficient hospitals in the province, but 85 to 90 per cent of hospitals are spending more per patient day than we are — it's a double standard."

York Central's deficit sits at \$5.3 million and Lussing said any recovery plan would have to involve cutting services.

Hospitals in the 905 area of the GTA have been pleading with the province for a new funding formula for years.

Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees, who represents communities served by Markham, Stouffville and York Central, promises the formula is on its way.

But even he is getting frustrated with the annual funding battles at York Region's hospitals.

"I know that, in York Region, we have growth pressures that have to be addressed, and I have been active in pressuring for a revised funding formula," he said, pointing out that, over the past four years, York hospitals have received an influx in extra operating funds and new programs.

"My frustration is we don't have this funding formula worked out. And until we have a revised formula, we will be

back in this position every year. And we shouldn't, but I've been assured we are getting close to a solution."

Maclean fears a new formula may not be the whole answer.

"Even with a funding formula, there's a lot of us who feel the system is underfunded," he said. "People don't expect less, they expect more, and the population is aging at the same time it is growing. You can't keep paying for that with the same dollars."

York County president Dan Carriere was expecting to be told to balance his budget, but he didn't expect the order to come from the premier himself.

"We were expecting the message, but we weren't expecting the dramatic approach. I heard a radio announcement yesterday with Mike Harris saying hospitals better get their budgets in line."

He said balancing the budget will mean service cutbacks, longer waiting lists and, perhaps, using capital funding to pay for operating expenses.

But Carriere said he remains optimistic extra funding will come through, because York County has been given a mandate by the province to provide regional programs such as cardiac care, perinatal and child mental health.

But if more funding isn't provided, Carriere said the hospital will start opposing new subdivision plans — even appealing to the Ontario Municipal Board if necessary to halt growth.

"Those are things we aren't very practiced at but demand is outstripping supply," said Carriere.

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