

Finding solution remains challenge

► **CARE FACILITY** FROM PAGE A1
 "We're a leader in the service provision of long-term care."

Although surprised Extendicare is pulling out and reluctant to say at this early stage if St. Joseph's will absorb the other 192 beds, Walker said there are good reasons for the LHIN to consider St. Joe's. Municipal buses stop at its doorstep and the sprawling Westmount Road location means there is lots of land.

"Would I want to do it? Not sure yet," Walker said, but added the Extendicare news isn't bad timing for St. Joe's.

"We haven't put a shovel in the ground yet," she said, adding construction of the 96-bed addition isn't scheduled to start until next spring.

Guelph General Hospital patient services vice-president Eileen Bain was also surprised by the news.

She had wanted the Extendicare facility to open next year to free up beds at Guelph General, which sometimes has up to 40 patients "who should be cared for in another setting" like a long-term residence, she said.

Coming up with an interim solution with the LHIN, the planning and funding body, is "going to be a significant challenge for the Guelph General," Bain said.

Markham-based Extendicare, with 81 senior care facilities serving more than 11,000 residents in Canada, is pulling out of projects in Guelph, Kingston and LaSalle, near Windsor.

"We need to slow down our pace of development and preserve our capital," spokesperson Rebecca Scott said, adding the decision is not just a project delay, but a permanent decision.

The company has given up its bed allocation.

"It's not a decision we made lightly," she said.



GUELPH MERCURY

Caroline Ku pedals her bike near the intersection of Norfolk Street and Waterloo Avenue in this October 2007 photo. Yesterday, the city was awarded \$127,100 from the federal government to encourage bike riding.

Feds provide funding for local bike strategy

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GUELPH — The City of Guelph is getting \$127,100 from the federal government to encourage bike riding. The money will go toward a strategy to triple the proportion of people riding their bikes.

Right now, 1.1 per cent of trips in Guelph are made by bike. That's pretty normal for our climate, city employee Jennifer McDowell said. But she wants to increase that to 3.3 per cent by 2018.

Specifically, the federal money will go toward an advisory committee to work on increasing bicycle use, and a survey to find out where cyclists travel to and what would encourage Guelph residents to ride.

The committee will work on planning a network of trails through the city, educating cyclists and drivers, encouraging people to ride bikes, and enforcing the rules of the road, McDowell said.

The money won't pay for putting in bike lanes on city roads. McDowell said often people believe driving is faster when bike short cuts and not looking for parking can make biking faster, especially for trips of less than five kilometres. That misconception, plus the worry about arriving at work sweaty, is the biggest barrier to biking, McDowell said.

She's encouraging employers to put in showers to overcome that problem, but added she expects the biggest increase in rides to be trips to see friends or to go to the corner store, rather than trips to work.

The federal money comes from a fund dedicated to transportation planning. Funding was announced yesterday for seven projects in Ontario that encourage environmentally transportation, including encouraging people to ride the bus in new suburbs in Waterloo.

Teachers' union to meet with members

► **STRIKE** FROM PAGE A1

"That dialogue needs to be over, and we need to get it done," Clegg said yesterday in a phone interview.

A 12 per cent salary increase offered by the province has always been acceptable to the union, he said.

What is not acceptable is the proposal the Ontario Public School Board Association brought to the provincial negotiating table, which he said would strip teachers of improved working conditions they bargained for in 2005.

Clegg, who is travelling throughout the province, said he met with members in Windsor on Wednesday and they were very clear they would not accept changes to working conditions, or funding inequities between elementary and secondary schools.

"When our members hear what the association offered, they're going to be angry," he said.

"And they're going to understand that they are not respected in the same way secondary school teachers are."

Talks between the union and the province ended in December, though local boards and local unions continue to negotiate.

But now, the 12 per cent raise over four years that was given to all other teachers in the province is no longer on the table.

"We have told boards that they are only getting two per cent over two years for salaries," Ministry of Education spokesperson Michele Despault said.

"We were very clear from the outset that if a provincial framework agreement wasn't reached, that's what would be available."

Undeterred, Clegg thinks school boards need to come up with more.

"If they're going to offer less than they offered secondary school teachers — they are mistaken," he said.

The stalemate is leaving local boards between a rock and a hard place.

Representatives from each of the 32 boards in the province met Wednesday to discuss a consistent approach to the issue, Upper Grand District School Board chair Bob Borden said.

"We're not interested in throwing a lot of dirt . . . and talks of stripping this and stripping that," Borden said.

"I won't do that to a profession that I spent 35 years in."

He thinks the local board can get a submission to the teacher's union by the end of January, as Clegg requested.

But that submission, and those of the other school boards, will only contain a four per cent increase.

"Each of us have no more money, so that's a given," Borden said.

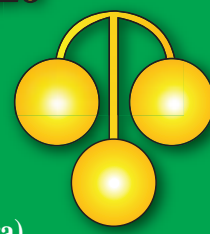
"If your chair believes they'll bring an agreement on the basis of two per cent, that is incorrect," Clegg said.

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On Page 2: AB® Rocket Fitness Machine is currently unavailable.

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