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Watsonville Hospital rebuilding plans move ahead

APR 27 1993

A recommended 'negative declaration' would mean that a full-scale environmental impact report would not be needed.

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A favorable environmental assessment by Watsonville's Planning Department puts Watsonville Community Hospital an inch closer to having a deal with Seagate Technologies on property for its new site.

The hospital and the disk drive manufacturer are negotiating on

Seagate's Watsonville site at Airport Boulevard and Nielson Street.

Watsonville Community Hospital was damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency has determined that it will be less costly to construct a new building than to repair the current one. It has been promised \$48 million by FEMA to do so and has

been looking for a promising site for some time.

The planning department, after looking over the hospital's preliminary plans, concluded that the hospital will have fewer affects on the environment — in just about all ways — than the manufacturing plant. If the hospital complies with the conditions the city imposed on Seagate when the plant

was approved, and complies with several other mitigations, there should be no negative impact on the environment as a result of the hospital, the department concluded.

The department is recommending that the Planning Commission adopt a "negative declaration," which means that a full-scale envi-

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ronmental impact report won't be needed. The commission is scheduled to look at the matter at its June 7 meeting.

Hospital spokeswoman Cory Allen said getting the negative declaration was one of the "conditions of sale" the hospital and Seagate need to satisfy before the sale is finalized.

"We're just going through the conditions one by one," Allen said. "I think everything is moving along and we feel really good about it."

Another hang up — whether FEMA can be convinced to give the hospital some money for land acquisition — remains unresolved.

But Allen said hospital CEO John Friel is scheduled to testify in Washington, D.C., May 7 in front of a congressional subcommittee that is looking into the possibility of reorganizing FEMA. Allen said the subcommittee is interested in hearing about the experiences of people and organizations as to the responsiveness of FEMA to various disasters.

According to the report, the hospital is looking at using about 27.4 acres of a 31.75-acre site. Seagate has developed 19.4 acres, including 709 parking spaces, a 207,000-square foot assembly-office building and a 25,700-square foot cafeteria building.

A preliminary plan submitted to the planning department said the hospital intends to convert the existing buildings to provide 233,000 square feet of space for hospital support staff, storage and maintenance, ambulatory care, physician's offices and administrative offices.

The plans call for a 31,000-square foot, three-story emergency-diagnostic treatment center, a 72,000-square foot, three-story 140-bed inpatient care area, a 2,880-square foot day care center and a heliport. The child care program at the hospital will be moved to the new site and will have a play area of 3,800 square feet. The project will include 1,096 off-street parking spaces.

The hospital is anticipating that it will eventually have a total of 750 employees.