

Hospital releases more documents

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Hospitals - WATSONVILLE Hospital

Community leaders still seeking delay of public hearing on hospital sale

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STAFF WRITER
WATSONVILLE — Supplemental documents regarding the sale of Watsonville Community Hospital were made available to the public and interested parties late last week for review, fulfilling a request made by city officials and community leaders who have been following the hospital's move toward a sale for months.

The documents, which stack up to about five inches, primarily provide more detailed information regarding the asset purchase agreement between the hospital and Community Healthcare Systems, a Tennessee-based healthcare corporation. Also included were minutes from hospital board meetings, an item that concerned community members and organizations were asking for. Hospital administration provided

the additional papers last Thursday, which were sent to the California Attorney General's office on June 26 and July 7. At a Watsonville City Council meeting last week community and council members spoke out about concerns that the hospital did not provide all documentation to the public regarding the sale agreement, and demanded that they see all supplemental materials.

Their concerns came on the heels of California Attorney General Dan Lungren's July 7 decision to deem the agreement complete. City officials and community members, led by Watsonville Mayor Dennis Osmer, expressed concern about the decision, claiming that not all documents were made public and that the public would need more time than the 60 days mandated by the state. See HOSPITAL, page 7

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City council members unanimously voted to urge Lungren to extend the 60-day review period and postpone a public hearing scheduled for August 1.

"It is inconceivable that our community will have any new documentation in time to conduct a thorough analysis prior to an August 1 hearing," Osmer stated in a letter to Lungren last week.

"We will work, however, with the greatest speed possible to review any documents that are provided."

Lungren and Deputy Attorney General Chet Horn, who is working on the deal, was not available for comment.

"Watsonville Community Hospital is of great value to all members of our community," Osmer wrote in the letter. "We want to ensure that it remain a treasured community asset."

Hospital President and Chief Executive Officer John Friel said he's had "a hard time understanding" the concern about the sale agreement and the hospital's process of providing information.

Friel reiterated that the process of providing information to the attorney general has been thorough, and that any information to the attorney general is considered public material.

"We're not hiding anything here," Friel said. "(The attorney general) asked for supplemental information, and we worked very closely with his office to get that information to him."

Friel said the hospital released the documents last week because it took some time to make copies for the press and interested parties, and that it had nothing to do with the city council's request last week.

Not only were the documents made available to the press and the coalition, but they are also available at the Watsonville Public Library.

Executive Director of Salud Para la Gente Arcadio Viveros, also co-chair of the Pajaro Valley Coalition to Save Community Health Care, said this morning that he had not had enough time to thoroughly review the documents but that coalition members would meet tomorrow to review them together, and to determine if all the documents they were interested in seeing were received.

The approximate 20-member coalition is composed of representatives from about a dozen organizations, including Santa Cruz County Central Labor Council,

Consumers' Union and California Nurses' Association. It has been meeting weekly to discuss the sale since hospital officials made it publicly known it was seeking purchase from a healthcare corporation.

A public hearing has been scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 1, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Henry J. Mello Center for the Performing Arts, located at 250 E. Beach St. The Attorney General's office will conduct the meeting to receive public comment regarding the sale agreement. Anyone interested in voicing an opinion at the meeting must send a request to do so to Steve Bauman, Investigative Auditor, Charitable Trusts Section, California Department of Justice, Suite 500, 300 S. Spring St., Los Angeles, Calif. 90013. Requests should be submitted by July 27 and should provide a time estimate needed for oral comments. For more information, contact Bauman at 213-897-2184.