

Mid-Coast Health Panel To Hear Dominican's Expansion Program

A nine-member panel has been appointed by the governing body of the Mid-Coast Health Systems Agency to consider Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital's application for a \$14-million, 114-bed expansion.

Chaired by John Barrow, who is administrator of the San Luis Obispo County General Hospital, the panel will convene at Aptos High School on Oct. 28 to take testimony from 7 to 11 p.m. from Dominican officials, officials of Community Hospital of Santa Cruz and the general public.

If time allows, the panel will decide at this open meeting whether to recommend that the Mid-Coast Health Systems Agency endorse Dominican's application for a Certificate of Need from the state.

"We are not entirely sure the decision will be made," cautioned Alan Samuels, MHSA executive director, "because we really have no way of knowing how many people want to give testimony."

Linda Bergthold, a Santa Cruz resident who is president of the MHSA Governing Body, has pledged that the hearing will be "entirely open and entirely fair," Samuels said, and this means everyone who wants to express support or opposition to the application will be given full opportunity to do so.

The MHSA Governing Body is composed of 16 consumer representatives and 14 providers of health care. The membership is drawn from the four counties served by the MHSA: Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey and San Luis Obispo. The panel, Samuels said, has been selected to reflect the mandated majority of consumer representatives.

Representing consumers on the panel are Jess Brown of Santa Cruz County, Mort Baldwin and Esther Martinez of San Luis Obispo County, Jay Bautista of Monterey County and

Regina Picietti of San Benito County.

Representing health care providers on the panel are Barrow of San Luis Obispo County, Bill Griffith, Seymour Lesser and Dr. Robert Van Horn, all of Monterey County.

Bergthold said there is always some reluctance to announce the members of a panel well before a hearing because of concern that supporters or opponents of an application will "pressure them" for the "right" decision. But the members are required to report before the hearing any efforts made by any individual or organization to influence their votes.

After the panel has made its decision, it will forward a recommendation to the governing body of MHSA. The governing body will then schedule a public meeting to discuss the application, get clarification of obscure points, if any, and vote in public whether or not to endorse the application.

This decision, whether favorable or unfavorable to Dominican, is not final. It is simply a recommendation that goes to the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development. The final decision is made at this level.

The Governing Body's decision one way or the other carries considerable weight, however.

Persons planning to attend the hearing will be briefed on procedures.

Samuels has told The Sentinel that the meeting will start promptly at 7 p.m. There will be a 20-minute introduction. Then Dominican will be given 30 minutes to make its official presentation.

Following this, the MHSA professional staff members will give their official analysis of the application and make their recommendations to the panel. This is to take about 20 minutes.

Next, Community Hospital of San-

ta Cruz will get 15 to 20 minutes to present its reactions to the Dominican proposal. This will be followed by a 10- to 15-minute rebuttal period for Dominican officials.

After a short break, the panel will reconvene to receive testimony from the general public.

To insure fairness to all sides, project supporters will get 30 minutes, then project opponents will get 30 minutes, and supporters and opponents will speak alternately in 30-minute segments.

Should there be no time for everyone to speak or for the panel to make its decision in public, arrangements will probably be made for a hearing continuance.

Samuels said he hopes that a hearing continuance will not be necessary. He said that considerable testimony for and against the project has already been received by mail.

But, Samuels stressed, if someone has something to say that others have not said, he or she certainly owes it to the Santa Cruz area to speak up.

Dominican's expansion plans to be considered by the panel do not include the recently-discussed 30-bed inpatient psychiatric facility which Sister Josephine Sullivan, hospital administrator, has pledged to build if the Board of Supervisors so desire and if Dominican gets the licenses to 47 medical-surgical beds now held by the county.

The expansion plans under consideration, rather, cover 47 medical-surgical beds, 53 skilled nursing care beds, six pediatric beds, eight critical care beds, two surgical suites, a radiology room with a fluoroscopic capability and expanded physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, respiratory therapy facilities and additional space for the clinical laboratory and dining room.