

# Hospital-hearing delay sought

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**WATSONVILLE** — Following the heels of city leaders, others are urging the state Attorney General's Office to delay a public hearing on the sale of Watsonville Community Hospital.

The Pajaro Valley Coalition to Save Community Health Care as well as the Consumers Union of San Francisco have fired off letters requesting a postponement of an Aug. 1 hearing.

"It's too big a deal to not examine closely and studiously," said Amy Newell, co-chair of the coalition.

The coalition, she said, is still interested in an impact study to address whether the sale will hurt local health care, and a valuation study on the assets of the hospital to be sold.

These studies are being commissioned by the AG's Office, but may not be available before the meeting.

The hearing date, Newell said, is too soon for the public to properly prepare for the meeting.

The date was recently set by the AG's Office, which determined the application for the sale of the non-profit hospital to the for-profit Community Health Systems of Tennessee was complete.

In an emergency action, the City Council last week urged the Attorney General's Office to delay the meeting.

Watsonville Mayor Dennis Osmer said Tuesday that he has not heard back from state officials.

His request for a delay, however, is

gaining the support of other groups and local officials.

The Consumers Union, publisher of Consumer Reports, wrote to state officials, saying the hospital "has not filed a satisfactory charitable uses plan since the original health impact statement is inadequate."

Assemblyman Fred Keeley, D-Boulder Creek, and Assemblyman Peter Frusetta, R-Tres Pinos, both are calling for a delay.

Keeley said his request shouldn't be taken as an objection to the sale of the hospital.

It's only to ask for some more time, he said Tuesday.

"I think it would be helpful to the overall best interests of the community if a bit more time was afforded to people to receive and review very complex and lengthy documents," Keeley said.

State Sen. Bruce McPherson, R-Santa Cruz, is aware of the situation, but has not called for a delay.

His office said the state has the option of calling for a second public hearing if needed.

Hospital president and chief executive officer John Friel said hospital leaders are preparing a presentation in anticipation of the Aug. 1 hearing.

He said he is a little surprised at the response to the hearing date.

The hospital, he said, has distributed copies of the original application and provided additional documents last week.