

Capitola health center approval called illegal

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CAPITOLA — The approval of the controversial Capitola Health Center was done illegally, an attorney for Watsonville Community Hospital claimed Thursday night.

Alan Smith alleged the initial environmental study on the project was done improperly. He also challenged the city's refusal to address the impacts the new hospital will have on health care county wide.

Smith's criticism came as the City Council considered appeals by the hospital and by the county of Santa Cruz of the planning commission's approval of the health center. The council postponed the

matter to March 28, requesting information on the state's plans to widen Highway 1 and on the project's impact on the Soquel Creek flood plain.

Capitola Health Center is being planned by a group of developers called Medical Surgical Management and by 40 local physicians on five acres between Nob Hill Foods and Highway 1 off Bay Avenue. It will include a hospital, outpatient treatment facility and a medical office building.

In approving the development, the planning commission agreed that no environmental impact report was needed. What impacts there will be, the commission

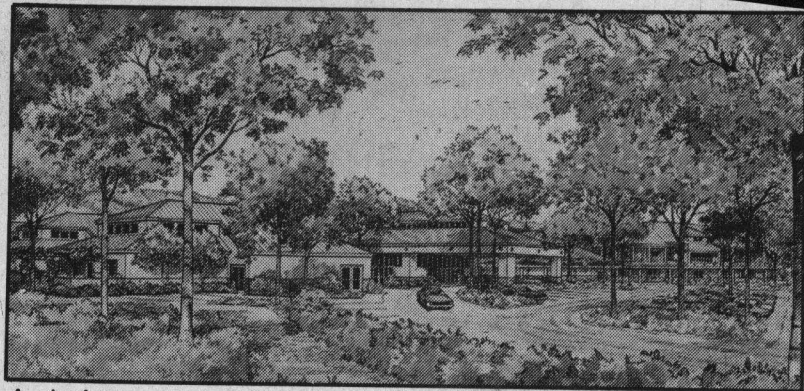
agreed, could be solved by city-imposed conditions.

The appellants would like to see more environmental review. Smith asked for a full environmental impact report.

Smith claimed the initial environmental study was illegal under state law because it was allegedly prepared by the applicant, rather than by city staff.

Smith added the initial study doesn't adequately address air quality, disposal of hazardous wastes and effects on the drainage of Soquel Creek.

Planning Director Susan Tupper and City Attorney Richard Manning disputed Smith's claims.



Artist's conception of proposed Capitola health center.

Smith also challenged Manning's statement that the City Council couldn't legally consider impacts on health care. Manning's warning to the audience not to bring up health care apparently worked; out of the packed audience, only three citizens addressed the council.

Smith alleged that the Health Center will take patients who can

pay and those with insurance, leaving the other hospitals with a disproportionate share of patients who can't pay their bills.

County Health Director Ellie Hall announced that the county Public Health Commission will hold a public forum this month on the impact the new hospital will have on health care.