

Critics of hospital site blast report

Group says suit could be reinstated

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WATSONVILLE — Watsonville Community Hospital officials could face a renewed battle in the effort to build a new hospital adjacent to the city airport.

A critic of the hospital proposal on Friday called a draft report prepared for the Federal Emergency Management Agency that endorsed the 27.5-acre site "very flawed, biased and misleading."

Hospital officials, however, supported the FEMA report.

Bill Dickerson, a board member of the Coalition for Responsible Airport Management and Policy, or CRAMP, said the the draft report, among other things:

- Failed to take into account the extent of development nearby.
- Incorrectly says there will be no flights directly over the hospital.
- Doesn't mention an airport master plan statement that building a hospital near the airport would constitute non-compatible land use.
- Minimizes the effect of light and glare from the hospital on pilots circling the airport, while specifying possible problems at all the other proposed sites.

The site, which the report calls the most suitable of the five examined, is at the intersection of Airport Boulevard and Nielson Street. It is owned by Seagate Technology Inc., which is extending the hospital an \$8.6-million loan to complete its \$67.4-million financing package.

CRAMP had filed suit last July. It withdrew the suit last month, but warned that it could be reinstituted at any time if CRAMP's concerns weren't addressed.

Although FEMA has endorsed the Seagate site in the draft report, it will accept public comment for its final report until March 18. After that, obtaining building permits is the next step.

Dickerson said refiling the suit is "always an option" and that his group would "step in" sometime between the start of the permit process and ground breaking.

He said he has sent a four-page rebuttal to FEMA, and will send the same material to other state and federal agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration offices in Washington.

Meanwhile, hospital spokesman John Friel said the FEMA draft report represents an affirmation that the best possible site was chosen. According to the report, "very few negative negative impacts would have to be considered" at the Seagate site.

"Obviously we were delighted with the outcome," he said. "We're pleased FEMA saw it the same way we did."



Friel

Hospital report

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Friel said the hospital still hopes to work with CRAMP to address its concerns. "Our position is the same as it has been. We feel both the airport and the hospital are valuable assets to the community, and we can work side by side," he said.

The new hospital would replace the current structure, severely damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

According to Dickerson, the report is biased because it drew on data from a report by P&D Aviation of San Mateo that was commissioned by the hospital.

He said that consultants on the FEMA report mistakenly thought they were relying on an unbiased report. The report also says a heliport on the hospital grounds would not interfere with air navigation, a conclusion Dickerson also disputes.

He also contested a statement

that that the runway nearest the hospital site is a "secondary" runway.

"That's totally untrue," Dickerson said. "It's the primary instrument-landing approach to Watsonville, and when there's a lot of fog from March to November, that's frequently used. I've seen as many as six (landings) an hour."

Dickerson also says the report does not mention that the airport is used by "ultra-light" aircraft, whose pilots aren't licensed by the FAA.

The main branches of the Watsonville and Santa Cruz public libraries have copies of the FEMA report. Comments on the report must be received by March 18. They should be addressed to Sandro Amaglio, Regional Environmental Officer, Presidio of San Francisco, Building 105, San Francisco, Calif. 94129. They should be marked "Attention: WCH DEA PUBLIC COMMENT."