

Planners approve hospital move

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✓ The Watsonville Planning Commission last night approved a special use permit for the Watsonville Community Hospital to build a new hospital on the Seagate Technology property on Airport Boulevard.

Last night's action clears one of the last hurdles for the hospital's move. The hospital's plan has already met environmental and safety requirements and received approval from the Federal Aviation Administration.

The hospital was heavily damaged by the 1989 earthquake. Hospital and Federal Emergency Management Agency officials decided to rebuild after the costs of fixing the old building rose to more than half the cost of replacement.

The hospital is now located at Green Valley Road and Holohan Road. It plans to move to a 27.5-acre site at Airport Boulevard and Nielsen Street. The lot was the site of Seagate Technologies, which has since closed down its operation in Watsonville. There are two large buildings on the property that Seagate used during

its operation.

Hospital officials said the new hospital will employ 750 workers, a net increase of about 100 jobs. In the initial stage, the new hospital will have 98 beds, but it expects to expand to 128 beds, with 343,000 square feet of available building area.

A helicopter landing pad will be constructed at the new hospital. The old hospital also has a chopper landing pad.

A group calling itself the Coalition for Responsible Airport Management and Policy raised opposition to the hospital's move.

CRAMP said placing the hospital across the street from the airport would present safety problems, particularly when a helicopter was departing or arriving at the hospital and other aircraft were flying over or near the airport at the same time.

The city planning department said the permit will become official within 14 working days. Within this period, an appeal could be filed with the city, halting the permit granting process until the City Council rules on the appeal.

Barring appeals and other developments
See HOSPITAL / back of section ▶

HOSPITAL

▶ From Page 1

lays, the hospital expects to close escrow with Seagate after the 30-day period. Remodeling of the two buildings on the property could begin as early as April.