

Watchdog group says more time needed to study hospital sale

Sentinel staff report

WATSONVILLE — A watchdog group monitoring the sale of Watsonville Community Hospital announced it is unable to take a stand on the sale until several issues are addressed.

The board of The Pajaro Valley Coalition to Save Community Health Care unanimously agreed Friday that it can neither support nor oppose the sale of the nonprofit hospital to Community Health Systems, a for-profit hospital chain based in Tennessee.

"With only three days left before the Attorney General's final hearing on this matter, concerns remain about the proposed deal," Arcadio Viveros, co-chairman of the coalition, said in a statement.

Until those concerns are addressed, the coalition cannot say the sale will be good or bad for the community, added co-chairwoman Amy Newell.

Formed to monitor the \$55 million sale, the coalition represents more than 16 organizations.

One of the coalition's concerns is that insufficient time has been allowed by the state for review of important documents, including an independent health-impact report released this week.

The overall conclusion of the study is that there appeared to be no major impact on health-care services from the sale of the hospital.

The coalition also said there is no mechanism in place to guarantee that CHS keeps promises it makes.

State officials are holding a public hearing Monday on the hospital sale. It will be at 6 p.m. at the hospital, 75 Nielson St., Watsonville.