

# Hospital to stay in Watsonville

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The Watsonville Community Hospital board of directors is not seriously contemplating moving the hospital to Aptos, a group of concerned residents was told last night at the end of a two-hour public forum.

The forum, a joint meeting of the board and the Watsonville City Council, was called to collect public testimony about the health-care needs of the community and the ways the public would like to see the hospital rebuilt.

The October 1989 earthquake jolted the current hospital building, causing damage to the plumbing system under the building. It would cost more to repair the pipes than to rebuild from scratch. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has awarded the hospital \$48.9 million for new con-

struction.

While location was one of the things the board said it wanted to hear about from the audience, it was made clear that FEMA will not allow the hospital to use the money to buy land, or to build something that didn't exist before the earthquake, Dr. John Happee, who is the chairman of the hospital board, told the crowd.

"There can be a certain amount of trade-off, but I don't want to mislead you," Happee said.

The hospital does have some maneuvering room, however, because it could sell or trade the property it owns — the Green Valley-Holohan roads site it is now sitting on, the 17-acre strawberry field next door, or a 12-acre site in Aptos behind the Seaciff Inn.

The Aptos property, one speaker said, was originally bought to be used as a money-maker for the

hospital so it could continue to break even while serving a lower-income population in Watsonville.

Members of the public who spoke gave voice to several rumors and worries that they said had been circulating. Chief among these, it became clear from the beginning, was that the hospital would relocate to Aptos.

Many people said that Watsonville's poor, who have to walk or take public transportation to get around, would simply not be able to get to Aptos. Others said the city's senior citizens would also have a harder time. At the very end of the meeting, Happee finally said that he didn't think the Aptos move "was even an issue," and several board members immediately echoed him.

Several speakers said they'd like to see the hospital even closer to downtown Watsonville than it is.

City Planning Director Maureen Owens said after the meeting, "I wish we had 17 acres in the city (for the hospital) — we just don't have anything flat left."

The cost of providing infrastructure in most sloughy, vacant sites within the city limits would also be steep, she said.

A similar concern speakers raised was the rumor that the board would do away with the hospital's emergency room or critical-care unit.

A former Watsonville Hospital nurse, Erma Coty, told the board that "a lack of an E.R. (emergency room) in this valley would be a death sentence for cardiac victims or accident victims."

A consultant hired by the hospital to help it plan and develop the new hospital, Jeff Goldsmith, said

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one option would be spreading the services out in satellite centers. That way, health care and health education would be more accessible, and people might seek treatment for chronic diseases before they reach the crisis stage, he said.

In the past, most hospitals have been built with now-obsolete enemies in mind, Goldsmith said — that is, infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, whooping cough and measles.

Now and in the future, Goldsmith said, people are living about 30 years longer and dying of more chronic diseases in which early intervention makes all the difference — diseases such as cancer, heart disease and AIDS. They are also increasingly suffering from debilitating conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease and arthritis.

"The center of gravity in health care has shifted from admitting people to the hospital to treating people on an out-patient basis," Goldsmith said. "We see a transition from the hospital being viewed as a place to take custody of a patient to a place that tries to empower families to manage their own health care."

In the future, hospitals will only admit about a third of the people who are now admitted, he said.

But, Goldsmith added, regular hospital beds will not disappear as long as there is a large number of people who are uninsured. People who are not able to pay for regular health care and who don't qualify for government programs will not get early diagnosis, education or treatment for their problems, he said.

Nurse Coty also said the satellite and out-patient scenario might not fit here.

"We have homeless people, and families who work and who cannot be at home with their sick or elderly — we (would be) looking at an

ideal situation in a not-so-ideal environment," she said.

Issues of affordability, accessibility, bilingual employees, and maintaining the quality of the current care were raised repeatedly, and other ideas and concerns that speakers brought up included:

- City Councilwoman Betty Murphy said she would like to see a day-care center for people with chronic diseases so that caretakers can take a break;

- Murphy also said she'd like to see more clinics, accessible and physically separated from "an A-OK peachy keen" emergency room, so that patients don't confuse the two and misuse emergency rooms for colds or other minor problems.

- Councilman Oscar Rios said his "wish list" included a back treatment center, and perhaps a training center for nurses;

- A.L. Resetar, who was on the site committee that chose the hospital's current location, said he'd like to see the new hospital built near the freeway, in order to attract patients from Aptos and North Monterey County.