

Zoning for hospital site on west side recommended

By CHRIS HAMILTON, Staff Writer

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WAILUKU – The Maui Planning Commission on Tuesday unanimously approved three land-use changes required for the proposed West Maui hospital to move forward.

Introduced by Council Member Jo Anne Johnson and referred to the commission for review and recommendation, the bills authorize 14.9 acres of agricultural land near the Lahaina Recreation and Civic Center as a location for the West Maui Acute Emergency Care Medical Center. The bills would:

- Change the community plan designation for the site from agricultural to public/quasipublic.**
- Approve a change in the state land-use designation from agricultural to urban.**
- Change county zoning from agricultural district to P-1 public/quasipublic district.**

Senior Planner Jeffrey Dack said that the bills will go back to the County Council and the Land Use Committee for approval.

Dack said the Planning Department reviewed the environmental assessment of the site and didn't find any significant issues.

West Maui Improvement Foundation President Joseph Pluta said West Maui hospital proponents already have received widespread council support, and he expects the land-use changes formalized by the beginning of the new year.

The medical center and its lead investor, Brian Hoyle, a hospital builder and banker with ties to Maui, are almost finished with the business plan as well for the \$70 million project, Pluta said.

Once the business plan and land-use changes are in place, the West Maui group will submit its application for a certificate of need to the State Health Planning and Development Agency. The certificate is required by state law for new medical facilities and includes reviews by three advisory panels to the agency.

Once it is submitted, the administrator of the State Health Planning and Development Agency has up to 120 days to make a decision.

"We've got to prove that we have the staff and the money and the wherewithal to do it," Pluta said. "We expect to succeed in every front, and we are moving forward on every front."

Pluta and Hoyle have said they hope the facility will be finished by 2010.

The men have also said they are in the process of negotiating with Maui Memorial Medical

Center to ensure that they are not duplicating services, a complication that could jeopardize the certificate of need application.

The campus-style facility would be built on 14.9 acres by donated by the Kaanapali Development Corp. Pluta said his foundation will receive the land deed once it has the certificate of need.

For eight years, the West Maui Improvement Foundation has worked to get a hospital on a side of the island that is often choked with traffic.

The facility's plans include: a 25-bed, critical-access hospital; an emergency room; two operating rooms; medical offices; a clinic; a 40-bed nursing home; 39 units for assisted living and 40 housing units for staff. However, the actual building has not yet been designed, said project planner Mich Hirano of Munekiyo & Hiraga, Inc.

Commission member Jonathan Starr suggested that the facility be an energy-efficient, green building and also asked the hospital's engineers about the water-retention ponds. He was told in addition to a 1-acre, 4-foot-deep pond, the developers would consider installing a water runoff cleansing system.

"We don't want to do anything to slow down this great project," Starr added.

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