

Chamber supports new hospitals

THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



Access to quality health care is critical for residents and visitors, and private investors continue to

step forward to

expand services so desperately needed on Maui.

We are thankful that an effort at the forefront of today's news and important to the Chamber of Commerce and our west side committee is making headway — a proposed West Maui medical center.

This project is a top priority of the chamber's West Side Committee, and we were thrilled this week when the developers of the new West Maui medical center, Newport Hospital Corp., filed a required certificate of need (CON) application with the State Health Planning and Development Agency (SHPDA). The submission marks the culmination of an eight-year grass-roots effort to bring acute-emergency-care services to the approximately 65,000 residents, visitors and commuters who are in West Maui each day. The new hospital would be the first built in the state in 20 years, according to the West Maui Improvement Foundation. The foundation's presi-

dent, Joe Pluta, who is also a member of the chamber's West Side Committee, said, "We have no doubt lives will be saved if we can build our West Maui hospital."

The lack of medical facilities on the west side of the island long has been cause for serious concern, with more-than-half-hour drive times from the west side to Maui Memorial Medical Center. The proposed facility would address that challenge by providing 25 medical/surgical beds, 10 intensive-care beds and three operating suites with acute-care units, all on 90,000 square feet. There are also plans for 40 long-term-care beds and a medical office building on the facility grounds.

Last year, the Maui Health Initiative Task Force, charged with identifying the county's pressing health care needs, listed a critical-access hospital in West Maui as a top priority. However, an acute-care hospital would offer more comprehensive care than a critical-access hospital; so an acute-care facility is planned.

Now the matter is before SHPDA, the agency responsible for the CON application review and determination, and we look forward to a favorable response. We also hope to see the Maui Memorial Medical Center support the project. Working cooperatively, these two facilities could benefit each other greatly, we think.

This west-side project would utilize private investment (as

would have the Malulani Health and Medical Center that was planned for Kihei but was shot down in October 2006) to offer expanded medical facilities and services in our community. The CON application provides for a hospital and nursing facility with an estimated total development cost of \$51.5 million. The Newport Hospital Corp. hopes to invest \$70 million or more in the development of additional health care services for West Maui in coming years.

SHPDA has approximately 30 days to review the CON application and provide feedback to the applicant. We are urging chamber members and residents to support this much-needed hospital in West Maui.

Additionally, bills are being taken up at the Legislature to address the CON process. The state House Health Committee unanimously approved legislation recently to provide more home rule to island communities affected by proposed medical facilities and services. The bill — co-sponsored by state Reps. Joe Bertram III of Kihei and Angus McKelvey of Lahaina, who were inspired by efforts to obtain new hospitals in South Maui and West Maui — now moves to the House Finance Committee. The aim is to improve the county's overall health care system by giving more influence over decision making to county residents. House Bill 3326 would establish

regional governing panels to review proposed health care facilities and services, and the proposed legislation would eliminate subarea councils, the Statewide Health Planning Council and the Certificate of Need Review Panel. We support this legislation as a step in the right direction.

In the meantime, the CON application is not the West Maui medical center's only hurdle. Land-use changes also are required at the county level. However, that effort seems to be going well, and kudos to council Land Use Committee members, who unanimously recommended approval of land-use measures needed for the construction of this West Maui medical facility. We look forward to approval by the full council when the matter is taken up next.

The Maui Chamber of Commerce actively supports the provision of coordinated and cost-effective health care services to our entire community. These services include additional hospitals; primary-, urgent-, emergency-, acute- and long-term care; and new health facilities provided by the private sector. We also support and continue to encourage efforts to repeal or revise the outdated CON, and to establish a reasonable process that allows the state to improve access to progressive, efficient and effective health care solutions.

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.