

Debate over hospital license heats up

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by Megan Burrow

After the rancor and fierce debate of the past few months over the re-opening of a full-service hospital in Westwood, both sides are awaiting a decision over whether the license of the former Pascack Valley Hospital (PVH) can be sold.

The Urban Health Institute of Roseland is currently assessing the value of the license and will be making a report. Judge Rosemary Gambardella ruled last month to allow Jack Zackin, the lawyer for PVH to hire the company.

The sale of the license would be just the latest way PVH has attempted raise money to pay its creditors since declaring bankruptcy in September of 2007. It previously auctioned its equipment, the hospital buildings and grounds, and its mobile-intensive-care-unit (MICU) license, for a total of about \$55 million.

Hackensack University Medical Center , which bought the 20-acre property in March of 2008, has filed an application with the State Department of Health and Senior Services for the transfer of the license. Hackensack hopes to open a 128-bed full service hospital at the site.

Megan Fraser, the director of marketing and communications at Valley Hospital in Ridgewood , points specifically to the auctioning of the MICU license as a valid precedent for the current court debate.

“We believe, as the estate does, that there is value to the license. The precedent is the MICU license that was valued and sold.”

Mike Pietrowicz, vice president of planning and program development at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center expressed a similar stance. “The license was not part of the property that was auctioned in early 2008,” he said. “We believe that the license that is still held by the estate is something that has value. We’re looking forward to how the courts rule. Everyone’s just waiting now.”

Westwood Mayor John Birkner said he takes exception to the idea that a hospital license can be marketed “as a commodity akin to a liquor license” and sold to the highest bidder. Clearly frustrated by the delay, Birkner wondered what would become of the empty buildings on Old Hook Road if a hospital were not to re-open at the site.

“I think it’s completely absurd,” he said. “It continues to be a shameless display by Valley and Englewood . They’re doing their best to delay the opening of the hospital and they’re playing a political game with it.”

Hackensack University Medical Center and Jack Zackin did not return phone calls.

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