

Health board next step for hospital proposal

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The next step in the state's review of Hackensack University Medical Center's proposal to reopen the bankrupt Pascack Valley Hospital in Westwood will take place on July 23, when the State Health Planning Board meets to decide whether to recommend its approval.

Hackensack has applied for permission to reopen the hospital as a 128-bed community hospital, in partnership with Legacy Hospital Partners, a for-profit company based in Texas.

The 11-member board, appointed by the governor, advises the state Health Commissioner on certificate of need applications. Once the commissioner receives the board's recommendation, she has 120 days to issue her decision.

The meeting date gives the commissioner a Nov. 20 deadline — 17 days after Election Day, when New Jerseyans will choose a governor.

Board members are to consider comments made at a public hearing on the application earlier this month and submitted in writing before the June 15 deadline. There will be a limited period at the meeting for public comment.

Hackensack University Medical Center's spokeswoman, Anne Marie Campbell, said the medical center would provide transportation to the meeting for those who request it.

The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood and Englewood Hospital and Medical Center strongly oppose the application.

"We will demonstrate our opposition by bringing a large number of supporters to the meeting as well as experts who will speak on our behalf," Megan Fraser, a spokeswoman for Valley, said Thursday.

"Once the members of the State Health Planning Board hear both sides, we believe they will make the right decision," she said. A decision "in the best interest of all of Bergen County ... ensures that the seven hospitals within just 15 miles of the Pascack Valley remain healthy and strong for years to come."

The meeting will take place at 9:30 a.m. at the National Conference Center at the Holiday Inn of East Windsor, 399 Monmouth St., East Windsor.

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