

## **Hackensack hospital asks state officials to reactivate bid to reopen Pascack Valley Hospital in Westwood**

Wednesday, January 6, 2010

BY LINDY WASHBURN  
STAFF WRITER

Hackensack University Medical Center has asked the state Department of Health to reactivate its application to open a 128-bed community hospital at the former Pascack Valley Hospital in Westwood, even though it is unclear whether the hospital license will be extended.

"We are now ready to proceed with this project," Robin Ratliff, an HUMC vice president, wrote to John Calabria of the state Health Department. She asked that the six-month deferral of the application, which was to end Thursday, be lifted.

The Health Department received the letter and had no comment, according to spokeswoman Donna Leusner.

The request comes a week after the hospital license for the Pascack Valley site expired and HUMC tried unsuccessfully to use a new law, designed to help developers during the recession, to extend it. The hospital is now seeking to have the license extended through the courts.

Both Englewood Hospital and Medical Center and The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood are fighting any extension of the license, which expired after a two-year grace period provided when the bankrupt hospital closed in 2007.

The application to reopen the hospital is not currently on the agenda of the State Health Planning Board, which must vote on a recommendation to the health commissioner about whether to approve or reject it.

Governor-elect Chris Christie declared his support for reopening the hospital while campaigning, and HUMC is counting on a new health commissioner to look favorably upon its application.

"We're certainly hopeful that the new Department of Health, under the new administration, will be more receptive to the real true need of this hospital in our community," HUMC president Robert Garrett said Tuesday.

HUMC requested a deferral of its application last summer after learning that the health department staff was prepared to recommend its rejection, according to hospital and political sources at the time.

On Tuesday, Garrett said the medical center had been advised by the Health Department last summer that it should meet with Englewood Hospital officials to try "to work things out." HUMC put "very substantive proposals on the table to help Englewood with their financial situation," he said. But Englewood remains opposed to any acute-care beds at the Westwood site, and no agreement was reached.

Last month, HUMC asked Health Commissioner Heather Howard to confirm that the Permit

Extension Act of 2008 automatically extended the license for a year. The act was sponsored by state Sen. Paul Sarlo, D-Wood-Ridge, an executive of the construction firm owned by Joseph Sanzari, who is a member of the board of governors at Hackensack University Medical Center.

"It is our position — and we think it's backed up not only by a review of the law, but by a review of precedent — that the Permit Extension Act automatically extends our license," Garrett said.

But Howard disagreed in a Dec. 23 letter. The hospital could appeal her decision to the Appellate Division of Superior Court, which handles cases involving state agencies, within 45 days, she wrote.

That same day, Bergen County Superior Court Judge Robert C. Wilson "denied without prejudice" an earlier request by HUMC for the extension. That ruling, too, allowed the case to proceed directly to the Appellate Division.

However, HUMC's attorneys have not appealed the case to the Appellate Division.

"Our legal team feels it is a Bergen County issue, and that's where it belongs," Garrett said Tuesday. "Our legal team doesn't necessarily agree with Heather Howard that it should be heard in the appeals court."

Meanwhile, attorneys for Valley Hospital on Monday filed legal papers asking that the case be transferred to the Appellate Division.

"This is just another example of Hackensack trying to bend the rules to suit its own purpose," said Megan Fraser, a Valley spokeswoman. By pursuing the action in Bergen County, "Hackensack is seeking what they believe to be a more advantageous forum," she said.

Englewood plans to file a similar motion, said its spokeswoman, Maria Margiotta.

The health commissioner's decision was correct, she said. HUMC "will continue to politicize and manipulate this issue until it serves their profit-motivated needs," she said. "Englewood Hospital continues to focus on the needs of the communities it serves."

Wilson set a Jan. 22 hearing date for Valley's request to transfer the case and gave the participants until Jan. 15 to file papers.

E-mail: [washburn@northjersey.com](mailto:washburn@northjersey.com)

---

Find this article at:

[http://www.northjersey.com/news/health/hospitals/80770707\\_HUMC\\_seeks\\_to\\_reactivate\\_expansion\\_bid.html](http://www.northjersey.com/news/health/hospitals/80770707_HUMC_seeks_to_reactivate_expansion_bid.html)

**The Record** - 150 River Street - Hackensack, NJ 07601