

Talbot seeks 'stick' to keep Memorial

By **STEVE NERY**
Staff Writer

EASTON — Talbot County officials have asked the Mid-Shore's state lawmakers to link a state bond bill for renovations at Dorchester General Hospital in Cambridge to Shore Health System's agreement to keep the Memorial Hospital at Easton in the Talbot County seat. Shore Health System operates both hospitals.

But Sen. Richard Colburn, R-37-Mid-Shore, and Dels. Addie Eckardt, R-37B-Dorchester and Jeannie Haddaway, R-37B-Talbot, said the two issues should not be tied together.

Talbot County Councilman Peter Carroll, County Manager Andy Hollis and County Engineer Ray Clarke discussed the hospital and other issues with the local delegation in Annapolis Jan. 16.

While the Talbot council supports a renovation and expansion to the emergency room of the Dorchester General Hospital in Cambridge, they asked the state politi-

cians to fund this project only if Shore Health System would agree to keep the Memorial Hospital in Easton. Haddaway, Eckardt and Colburn, however, did not support the county's request.

The county council has been concerned with SHS relocating Memorial for some time now. CEO and President Joseph P. Ross has acknowledged that a possible future location is at the intersection of U.S. Route 50 and state Route 404, near the line of Queen Anne's County, but also said they are in the very early stages of considering the move or expansion. SHS also owns a farm off of the Easton Parkway, which it purchased in the 1980s as a future hospital site.

While the council supports the renovation and expansion at Dorchester General, members are concerned SHS could use that as a justification to leave Easton.

"Economically, it has the potential to be very serious for Talbot County," Carroll said of the possibility of the hospital leaving.

The medical industry is the second-biggest employer and the second-highest paying industry in the county, he noted. The problems would be compounded in Easton, which already has some financial troubles, Talbot Councilman Dirck Bartlett added.

The improvements are necessary at Dorchester General, Haddaway said. The fiscal year 2008 budget, as proposed, includes \$500,000 for the renovation, although it still needs to be passed by the legislature.

"From my perspective, those are two separate issues," Haddaway said. "Obviously, I would love to see

Memorial Hospital stay in Easton."

"That's certainly a worthy goal and I'm supportive of that," Colburn said.

At the same time, however, SHS is a business, and it's difficult to restrict what a business can and what cannot do, he said.

Colburn also said he had never seen such a qualifier put in a bond bill request, and he didn't want to do anything to jeopardize the Dorchester General renovation.

Regional growth is forcing SHS to consider the health needs in other counties besides Talbot, Eckardt said.

"They're outgrowing their campus, that's the bottom line," she said. "So how do they expand, and where do they expand?"

Colburn met with Talbot Councilman Philip Carey Foster Wednesday, he said, and suggested the council again meet with SHS officials, and possibly follow that up with

a meeting involving state officials.

The best solution involves working with SHS to find an amicable solution, Colburn said. While it will be difficult, they should make every effort to do so, he said.

Should SHS decide to relocate the hospital, Eckardt said, she believes it will still keep a health campus in Easton to address emergency care and other services. She would support SHS and the community looking at services critical to downtown Easton, she said.

SHS spokesman Patti Willis recently told *The Star Democrat* that while they are looking for a new location, they also have no plans to abandon the current facilities.

Eckardt said she believes hospitals do a good job of determining how many patients come in, where they come from, and other data which needs to be analyzed in determining where to locate health facilities.