

Council, Shore Health System hold closed meeting on Memorial Hospital

By **STEVE NERY**
Staff Writer

EASTON — As scheduled, the Talbot County Council held a closed meeting with Shore Health System President and CEO Joseph P. Ross Tuesday, but only three council members attended.

Ross spoke about competitive business factors, according to Councilmen Peter A. Carroll, Dirck Bartlett and Levin F. "Buddy" Harrison IV, who attended the meeting. Council President Thomas G. Duncan and Councilman Philip Carey Foster, however, did not want to have access to any information that Ross was unwilling to share with Talbot County citizens.

Also, in regards to the Memorial



JOSEPH ROSS,
Shore Health
System CEO

Hospital at Easton, the council approved \$25,000 in funding to be spent on lobbying concerning legislation by Sen. E.J. Pipkin, R-36-Upper-Shore, intended to allow for a free-standing medical facility in Queen Anne's County.

The county council will split the cost with the Easton Town Council, which on Friday voted to authorize Mayor Robert Willey to hire a lobbyist to ensure Pipkin's legislation doesn't inadvertently help lead to the loss of Memorial Hospital.

While the county council's Tuesday agenda included the introduction of two administrative resolutions creating committees to help retain the hospital in Easton, neither bill was introduced.

Carroll said he wanted Easton first to have a chance to review one of the reso-



**"BUDDY"
HARRISON**

lutions, which would appoint a joint action committee to develop solutions to problems that could lead to the loss of the hospital.

While Foster said he asked County Attorney Michael Pullen to draft a separate resolution to adopt a hospital retention task force, he withdrew it Tuesday.

The councilmen disagreed about the executive session with Ross, but said they understood each others' decisions and that they all share a common goal of retaining Memorial Hospital. Ross has said he wanted to share business information with the council that he didn't want business competitors to have access to.

Foster said he decided not to attend the closed session because he didn't want to be in the position of later publicly asking Ross about something that was told to



**PETER
CARROLL**

him in private. After Ross and other Shore Health System officials gave a lengthy presentation to the Easton Rotary and met with *The Star Democrat* editorial board, Foster said he didn't see the need for a private meeting anyway.

Duncan said he won't accept the hospital moving outside of Easton at all and that 35,000 people have a right to know about what's going on. He's being contacted by county citizens about the hospital, he said, and doesn't want to have knowledge from a closed meeting that he couldn't share with them.

"If it were that informative to you, it should be that informative to all the folks sitting in this audience right now," Duncan said to the three councilmen who attended the meeting.

Carroll said it was "unfortunate" the two missed the meeting, and encouraged

See **COUNCIL**
Page A15

COUNCIL

From
Page A1

them to offer to meet with Ross at a later date. "You missed a significant opportunity," he said. "A negotiation has to be a two-way street."

Bartlett said the closed meeting was limited to gaining an understanding of the hospital's financial concerns. Ross noted that there will be opportunities for public comment, he said.

Harrison was "encouraged" after meeting with Ross, he said, saying that it is important for the council to remain a part of the dialogue.

"If we don't start talking with them, we never

will," Harrison said.

The county and all its towns discussed hiring a lobbyist last week, Harrison said, although only Easton and the county will pay the bill.

Foster said he had no recollection of the county ever hiring a lobbyist before, but said "we would certainly feel badly if our failure to participate in this contributes to the loss of that facility."

Duncan said it is important for the public to get energized as well. There are not only rumors about Memorial Hospital leaving Easton, he said, but hospital officials had matter-of-factly stated in the past that the hospital would be moving.

2/28