

# Guest Comment by Harry Shaw

## Memorial Hospital, where are we?

By HARRY SHAW  
Guest Comment  
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It may be helpful to take stock of where the issue of Memorial Hospital's future stands.

It now seems widely accepted that a newer, up-to-date, full-service hospital will be needed to meet the needs of the Mid-Shore's growing population and that our existing Memorial Hospital, which has long served as the regional hospital, will need to be replaced. Because creating a new hospital entails a multi-year process of planning, land acquisition and construction, Shore Health System has already begun a planning process that CEO Joseph Ross expects to take 12 to 18 months.

In The Star Democrat of February 18, Ross asserted that only the Board of Directors of the Shore Health System "can decide what the planning process outcome will be." More likely, the final say within the health system community will lie with the University of Maryland Medical System (UMMS) with which the Shore Health System has affiliated.

Boiled down to its essence, the issue is where any new regional hospital will be located and who decides. CEO Ross has acted as if this is essentially a business — bottom line — matter to be decided behind closed doors within the UMMS/Shore Health System and, presumably, imposed on the affected communities without recourse. Surely, he knows better. Memorial Hospital is a public institution, as will be any successor.

Relocation of a hospital must reflect a range of considerations beyond what the health system's board is competent to decide. These include: available land, access to current and projected utilities, effects on local businesses, distances to hospital and doctors' offices, traffic considerations, effects on emergency (fire and EMS) services, housing availability, accessibility for elderly patients, consequences for existing retirement residences and assisted living facilities dependent on hospital services, to name a few.

Because no relocation is likely to affect these aspects the same way for different counties and towns, any decision on locating a new hospital inevitably will provoke controversies with political implications.

Recognizing the importance of Memorial Hospital to Easton and Talbot County, the Talbot Preservation Alliance (TPA) has scheduled a public forum where these and other implications of the hospital's relocation or replacement by a new regional hospital can be reviewed and discussed. The forum will be held at the Avalon Theatre in Easton at 7 o'clock tonight. Admission is free.

I urge all Talbot County citizens to attend and learn what we must do to ensure that whatever the “health industry” plans is to the benefit of our community and considerate of the needs of our Mid-Shore neighbors.

*Harry Shaw is a retired Army officer who lives near Easton.*