

## Consultant Says Patients Should Help With Mental Health Center Building

Stanislaus County could be doing something quite remarkable in planning its community mental health center, Christopher Alexander of San Francisco told the Stanislaus County Mental Health Advisory Board yesterday.

Alexander is head of the center for Environmental Structures, a firm which specializes in coordinating human and structural factors in building projects. Under a National Institute of Mental Health grant, he is collaborating with the Sacramento firm of Nacht & Lewis Architects in designing Stanislaus County's mental health center.

One of Alexander's proposals is for patients to paint and do other finishing work in the center to give them a "sense of possession."

Recently revised plans for the center have been approved by the NIMH on the state level, and federal approval is expected

momentarily, according to Gardner Hutchins, county administrative analyst. The revision eliminated 25 beds and added facilities for child and adolescent services.

### Location Changed

Location of the building also has been changed from the southwest corner of the Scenic General Hospital site to the northwest corner, where the Probation Department office now stands.

Alexander calls for a "village like" series of small buildings, two double story and the remaining buildings single story. Access would be along driveway off Scenic Drive to the main entrance to reception, crisis intervention and administrative quarters.

The driveway would wind through the complex to outpatient treatment quarters and separated buildings for adults, children and adolescents.

The hub would be an occu-

pational therapy building, which Alexander described as a "great community hall." A greenhouse would be part of the occupational therapy program. Plants grown at the center will be used both for therapy purposes and for site landscaping.

Also included is a day child care facility where children or patients would be supervised while their parents undergo treatment. A video studio and records quarters also are planned.

Each building would have its own garden and shady porch which Alexander said would be conducive to outdoor therapy.

### More 'Comforting'

Alexander said in planning the complex such factors were considered as the effect of lighting on ability of individuals to relate to each other. In the reception quarters, the receptionist will be stationed to one side instead of the middle. "When a patient enters, the reception-

ist will walk over to him and greet him."

He told the board the setting will be more "comforting than institutional."

Alexander also proposed the mental health program start up before painting and final finishing are completed. Patients and staff, he said, could "take possession in the real psychological sense" by doing the finishing touches.

Alexander said the Stanislaus County building plan is unique in mental health center construction and said it has attracted much favorable comment.