

# Wingspread decision is postponed

## Foes, backers out in force

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SANTA CRUZ — Any concerns that the fate of the Wingspread development might reach a conclusion are premature. The issue, which has bobbed up and down like an ocean buoy for several years before county agencies, continued to have a life of its own, after a three-and-a-half hour hearing before the Planning Commission Wednesday night led to a postponement to next week.

Planning commissioners heard testimony first from Conference Associates, the group representing developer Ryland Kelley, and then from Friends of Porter-Sesnon, which opposes the project.

There had been some speculation a resolution of the long-simmering controversy might be imminent after the county planning staff recommended approval of the condominium/performing arts complex on the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos.

The staff urged approval of the larger of two proposals advanced by the Palo Alto-based developer. This proposal, known as "Plan B," calls for 295 condominium units, a performing arts center and several athletic fields. The staff recommended several mitigations to the proposal, including a public vista and redesigning the main entrance.

After a consultant's report about the environmental impact report used by the staff, Tim Welch of Wingspread introduced a series of speakers who spoke in favor of the performing arts center and sports fields.

Welch called for the commission not to deny Plan A, the original, smaller, Wingspread proposal, because it was in accordance with the county's Local Coastal Plan. Denying it would make it more difficult to get Plan B accepted, he said.

He also mentioned that Wingspread would add approximately \$1.2 million a year in tax revenues to county coffers.

Former Cabrillo College President Robert Swenson, UCSC music professor Edward Houghton and community arts activist Rowland Rebele discussed the performing arts complex, saying that an urgent need existed for additional facilities.

"Compared to the resources of natural beauty that abound here, the cultural life resources are relatively impoverished," Houghton said.

Details of a contract between Wingspread and the performing arts foundation were provided by the speakers. Among them:

- Three halls would be constructed. One would seat 1,000 and be primarily for music. Another would seat 500 and be primarily for drama. A 200-seat theater also would be constructed.

- Conference Associates would lease the buildings to the foundation for \$1 a year until 2078, when Kelley's lease with the state runs out.

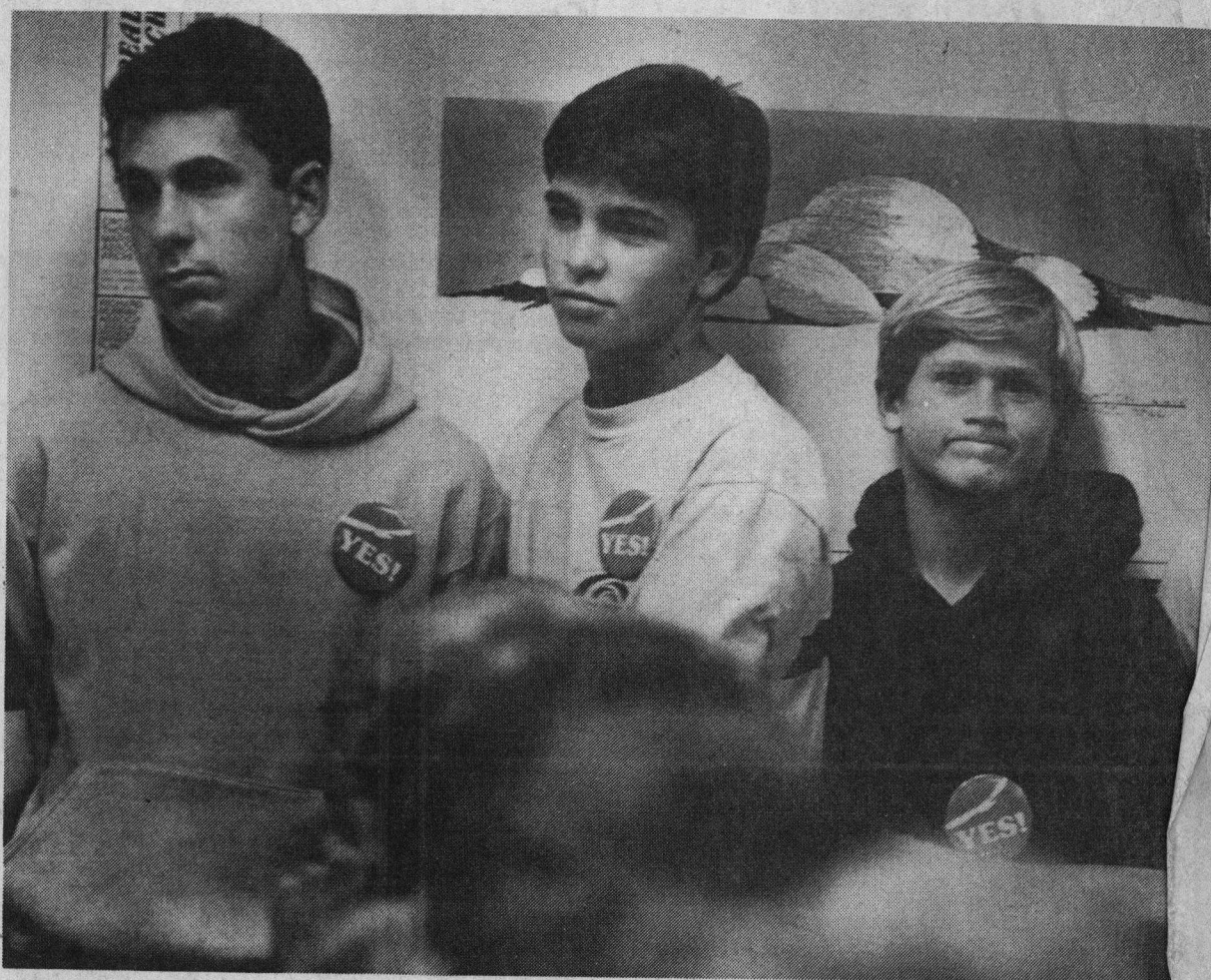
- No condominiums could be sold or rented before the performing arts halls are completed.

- A subsidy — \$500,000 or 8 percent of Wingspread's room revenue, whichever is greater — would be given by the project to the foundation to cover operating costs of the center.

- Local organizations would get "first call" on 40 percent of available dates at the complex.

Several speakers also spoke in favor of the sports fields proposal. After Dan Braga of the sports foundation spoke of the need for a Pony League baseball diamond, Commissioner I.H. Eberly asked about the possibility of making additional use of the fields by putting in a lighted softball field.

County District Attorney Art Danner also spoke in favor of the sports facilities, which are to include two soccer fields and the baseball field at a cost of \$1.2 million to the foundation.



Bill Lovejoy/Sen.

## Wingspread supporters Paul Braga, Robert Lovering and Kevin Dueck at hearing

A \$100,000 subsidy from Wingspread would be granted for operating costs.

In conclusion, Dan Nielsen of the arts foundation spoke of the economic and community benefits of the Wingspread proposals and said, "If a motel or RV park goes in, few in the county will use it." He presented a list of 3,000 signatures supporting Wingspread to the commission.

Then it was Friends of Porter Sesnon's turn.

Penelope Kenez said Wingspread proposals were not consistent with the LCP or the county's General Plan and said, "Even Plan A would have substantial negative impact."

She said the proposed Civic Auditorium expansion would partially fulfill the local need for a performing arts facility and suggested the rest of the Wingspread public facilities could go in somewhere else in the county.

She wondered why the public benefits analysis to be done by the county administrative officer had not yet been presented and why design specifications for the "wonderful, unique performance hall" were not included in the EIR.

Kenez mentioned that the performance halls were to be a patented type of construction, using a patent Kelley owns.

A proposed state park could include sports playing fields, she said, adding that "no one has ever proposed for this land that it would be simply open space." Changing the zoning from "parks and recreation" to "visitor accommodations" as proposed, would set a bad precedent, she said, and asked for a "second-

ary" EIR to be prepared addressing this issue.

Cheri Bobbe of FOPS said tourists, according to research, were unlikely to use the Wingspread performing arts facilities, since of the county's 8 million annual out-of-town visitors, only 1 million stay the night. She pointed to Cabrillo College, UCSC, the Civic Auditorium and Watsonville's Fox Theater as providing space for local performing groups.

"I understand the intense desire and emotion by special-interest groups," Bobbe said, "but we can performing-arts ourselves to death." Greg Hudson of FOPS and a resident of Seacliff, said the need for sports fields was mitigated by the community's need to "preserve a way of life."

Hudson said FOPS had been visiting the state Parks and Recreation Department in Sacramento and found director William Briner amenable but non-committal about the possibility of putting playing fields into a proposed state park on the Porter Sesnon property.

Other speakers discussed the impact on wildlife, parking problems, erosion, traffic jams on Highway 1 and on Park Avenue as the performing arts halls emptied.

One speaker, Rosalie Kraft of Aptos, said Waikiki Beach came to mind when she thought about the project.

A FOPS sketch of a proposed state park with camping and RV sites was pinned to the wall next to Wingspread's sketches.

Mitchell Page, a former county planning commissioner and head of

the law firm representing FOPS, discussed what he said were the legal implications of the proposal. Page helped draft the LCP and said the staff report recommending approval "misses the point. The coast should be the primary concern. The question is whether the project is an asset to the coast, not vice-versa."

He said the application makes a "mockery" of the LCP process and said that if the commission granted the applicant's plan, the LCP would have no meaning. He said the commission would be doing Kelley a "favor" by stopping the project before he finds out he cannot pass various sections of the state Coastal Act.

Kelley, Page said, was "shrewd — he found a need and exploited it," providing public benefits and finding people in need of such benefits. Page suggested that the benefits would dissipate as soon as the favorable aspects of tax depreciation from the purchase of Wingspread condominiums began to dwindle.

Page spoke for approximately 40 minutes, using up most of the remaining time before the 11 p.m. adjournment and causing one irate member of the audience to loudly protest.

After Eberly suggested to Page that if Wingspread had been considered five years ago in the drafting of the LCP, perhaps the Miss California Pageant, for lack of space would not have left the county, after a letter from the Sierra Club opposing the project was read, meeting was adjourned and postponed to 7 p.m. next Wednesday.