

Coastal Commission hurdle remains for Wingspread

Local Coastal Plan changes a serious concern

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By STEVE SHENDER

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — County supervisors have yet to make up their minds about Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley's controversial Wingspread project, but state Coastal Commission officials have already signaled that they will not lightly suffer changes in the county's Local Coastal Program (LCP) intended to accommodate the development.

Wingspread Plan B, which is currently being considered by the board, calls for construction of a conference center, three-hall performing arts complex, athletics fields and 295 condominiums — subdividable into 590 separate one-bedroom units — on the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos. A modified version of that plan, worked out in negotiations between Kelley and County Administrative Officer George Newell, calls for construction of 520 condominiums and a 20-space youth hostel on the site, which Kelley leased from the University of California in 1978 for \$1.75 million.

In both cases, the number of units proposed exceeds the maximum number allowed under the county's coastal program, which limits "visitor" accommodations on the Porter-Sesnon property to 130 units.

The LCP would have to be changed before either plan could proceed. In a letter to the Board of Supervisors this week, Coastal Commission District Director Edward Brown said the county will have to make a good

case for the needed changes in order to get them through the commission.

Brown said that commission staffers believe "an attractive and functional visitor-serving facility" could be developed at Porter Sesnon "in accord with current Local Coastal Program policies." Should supervisors try to change the LCP to make room for Wingspread, Brown wrote board Chairman Gary Patton, "the burden of proof ... that the complete document, as amended, will remain consistent with the Coastal Act" would fall on the county.

The commission's decision on the consistency of the LCP changes needed for Wingspread, Brown said, would — among other things — depend on whether the project makes provision for "lower-cost visitor and recreational facilities;" includes protection for oceanfront land "suitable for recreational use;" gives "priority ... to visitor-serving commercial facilities designed to enhance public opportunities for coastal recreation."

Brown said that in their analysis of any LCP amendments submitted to the commission by the county, commission staffers would "consider all development that could be permitted" under the proposed amendments, rather than simply the Wingspread plan pending before the board.

The coastal official indicated that staffers already have concerns about the project. In view of the "more intensive and less public use" contemplated for the Porter-Sesnon property under the Wingspread plan,

he wrote, "we would need assurances that the habitat can still be protected and lower-cost visitor facilities will still be adequately provided."

Brown said commission staff members were also concerned about the project's impact on traffic and "the coastal viewshed."

"We consider changing the LCP a major undertaking," Dave Loomis, Coastal Commission assistant district director, said Thursday. "It's one to be taken seriously; it's not like saying, 'OK, we want to be purple this month.'"

Loomis said Brown's letter, written at the request of "county staff," was intended as a timely alert to supervisors of the Coastal Act issues surrounding the Wingspread proposal.

"The issues should be put on the table early and not after the county has taken action," he said. "We're trying to lay it all out as to the issues we see — we haven't finished our analysis."

Loomis said that in its review of the Wingspread proposal and related LCP changes, the staff would "focus (the) spotlight on our law (the Coastal Act) and not just on what may be the county or community objectives."

While there might be other answers to the question of how the Porter-Sesnon land might best be used in a manner consistent with the Coastal Act, Loomis said, "we already have one on the books, and we're happy with it."