

Wingspread's carrot: Performing arts center

By BUD O'BRIEN

The desire for a performing arts complex in Santa Cruz County is one of the most powerful weapons at the disposal of the people who want to develop the much-coveted Porter Sesnon property near Aptos.

The Palo Alto firm of Hare, Brewer and Kelley — which holds a 99-year lease on the 66-acre parcel fronting Monterey Bay across the freeway from Cabrillo College — is dangling the prospect of such a performing arts complex as a king-sized carrot for the community if it is allowed to develop a 295-unit condominium-conference center project on the property.

Almost everybody agrees that the county could use a facility in which musical, dramatic and other theatrical events could be properly staged. But there is sharp disagreement, honed by political and philosophical antagonisms, over the

proposal of Conference Associates, the subsidiary of Hare, Brewer and Kelley that is trying to develop the Porter Sesnon property, to toss in the performing arts complex "free" if it can get approval for the rest of its project.

Ryland Kelley, head of the development firm, has pledged that the complex — a 1,000-seat and a 500-seat theater — would be under the control of an independent foundation and would be guaranteed a substantial amount of revenue annually from the income generated from the condominium rentals and use of the conference facilities. The enemies of Kelley's proposal have scoffed at his assurances and have expressed suspicion that things would not really turn out as rosily as he suggests.

All of which has left many of the supporters of the performing arts in the county in a delicate situation. Many of them yearn for the sort of performing arts facilities that Kelley's proposal has promised, but they do not want to get caught in the politi-

cal cross fire that has peppered the plans for development of Porter Sesnon since they were first advanced.

But now a group of county citizens who have long been active in community artistic affairs has taken a stand that, while it stops short of endorsing any particular development on the Porter Sesnon property, calls Kelley's offer to provide a performing arts complex one that would benefit the entire community.

Talking to newsmen recently, three members of the board of the Wingspread Arts Foundation, which would be in charge of the performing arts complex, said that the foundation has an ironclad agreement with Conference Associates concerning the construction and operation of the complex.

E.T. (Bud) Kretschmer, who is chairman of the foundation and a longtime participant in Santa Cruz Symphony and Cabrillo Music Festival activities; Diane Cooley, secretary of the foundation and Pajaro Valley native; and Ed Houghton, professor of music at UC-Santa Cruz and chairman of the program committee of the foundation board, were most anxious to demonstrate their independence of the developers.

"We are not cheerleaders (for Kelley)," Mrs. Cooley said. Rather, she said, the foundation directors consider their job to be to determine what the best deal for the county would be in the way of performing arts facilities. She said if the board found the Kelley proposal to be deficient, "we would look elsewhere. We're answerable to the public."

But Mrs. Cooley, Kretschmer and Houghton all made it clear

that in their view the agreement that has been reached after long negotiations between their group and the developers would lead to an excellent facility and would benefit the entire county.

Kretschmer said the members of the foundation, which include many names familiar to the county's business, education and artistic communities, had been involved in planning the performing arts complex from the ground up. He said they had consulted with the architects in the buildings' design, and had been careful to stitch together an agreement with Kelley that would protect the integrity of the foundation's control over the complex.

The agreement, the directors said, calls for

a minimum of \$5,250,000 to be spent on constructing the facilities and commits the developers to contribute \$750,000 in "seed money" over the first four years of the complex's operation to get it off the ground. In addition, the agreement guarantees the arts foundation at least \$500,000 a year, the money to be derived from a surcharge on the vacation rentals. If the amount of that (8 percent) surcharge exceeds \$500,000, that excess shall also go to the foundation up to another \$500,000, beyond which the proceeds would be divided 50-50 between the foundation and Conference Associates.

Noting that many opponents of the project had cast doubt on the intention of Kelley to follow through on his promises, Kretschmer said the agreement is unequivocal in its stipulation that "construction of the arts facilities shall be concurrent with, or in advance of, the construction of the (rest of the) development." There are other guarantees in the agreement, Kretschmer noted, including one that local performing arts groups will have use of the facilities for 40 percent of performance time; the foundation would be in charge of scheduling.

All in all, the three foundation directors didn't disguise their hopes that, somehow, a development will be allowed on Porter Sesnon that will allow their cherished performing arts complex to be built.

"We need it desperately," Kretschmer said. He said it would solve some of the nagging problems that afflict the performing arts in the county, and he, Houghton and Mrs. Cooley expressed their belief, after looking at alternatives, that a better chance for obtaining the needed facilities wouldn't come along for years, if ever.

REFERENCE

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