

Wingspread project resurrected, scaled down

By BOB SMITH
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Nineteen months after voters overwhelmingly rejected the Wingspread conference-performing arts complex on the Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos, new plans for the parcel were filed with the County Planning Department.

The plans submitted by Hare, Brewer and Kelley representative

Tim Welch call for 197 rooms on the 72.7-acre parcel adjacent to New Brighton State Park.

Dubbed Meadowpark by developer Hare, Brewer and Kelley, the plan eliminates the public performance halls, but includes 91 beach-access parking spaces and 50 additional public parking spots. It also keeps approximately 86 percent of the property in public open space, with the public beach between Potbelly Beach and Las Olas Drive dedicated to the county and a 10-foot-wide public access trail opened to the beach. The lodge covers 76,324 square feet; the conference rooms and administration, 36,465 square feet, and the recreation center, 33,728 square feet.

County planner Mark Deming said project manager Tim Welch filed preliminary plans with the department's development review group seeking a preliminary review of the project.

"It is not the actual application," Deming said.

Deming said the review process calls for the 20 sets of plans delivered yesterday by Welch to be distributed to other county departments and outside agencies — anyone who has a responsibility for reviewing the project. The list

extends from county departments such as public works and flood control to the Soquel Creek Water District to the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District, Deming said.

Deming plans to give everyone involved about a month to review



The scaled-down project includes hotel rooms and playing fields, but no performance space.

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the plans. In mid-March, he said, there will be an inter-departmental meeting with Hare, Brewer and Kelley to review the

project. Once that meeting is held, the company can then revise its plans if necessary and file a formal application with the county.

Deming said he thinks the application can be processed within the county time line of six months for new developments.

Capitola Planning Director Susan Tupper said this morning that the city's position is still that the Porter-Sesnon property should be turned into a state park.

But she added that the county may have a tough time turning down HBK's latest plan.

"It seems to meet all of the county's general plan, zoning and local coastal plan requirements," Tupper said.

The original Porter-Sesnon parcel was leased by Hare, Brewer and Kelley from the University of California, which received it as a gift. HBK holds a 99-year lease on the 66 acres. The Palo Alto-based firm also built Pajaro Dunes.

"This is probably what we used to call Plan A — the 197-unit lodge without the performance facilities or playing fields," Welch said yesterday afternoon. (Plan B called for 398 units on the property.)

"The situation is that after the election in 1988 we really needed to come back with a proposal that fit the Local Coastal Plan and the General Plan," Welch said. He believes the new plan meets all of the criteria.

"It has had the tennis courts reduced to three so that the footprint (of the project) is smaller," Welch said yesterday.

"We took great pains to insure that impervious surfaces and structural improvements are well within the county parks and recreation zone limitations," he said. "We don't believe this will require another EIR because it has much less impact than the previous proposal. The traffic is much less because of the lesser number of rooms and the elimination of the performing arts facilities.

"Even the land movement is less. Every aspect of the building process is much less."

Vicki Powell-Murray, spokeswoman for Friends of Porter-Sesnon and the leader of the opposition that defeated the Wingspread plan 1½ years ago, agrees with Welch that the new proposal is similar to the old Wingspread plan.

And she doesn't like the new plan any better than the old one.

Powell-Murray contends that Meadowpark is simply a warmed-over Wingspread Beach plan A.

"The use designation (on Porter-Sesnon) is 115 to 130 units," Powell-Murray said. "Where he comes up with 197 is by including the Widera property, which is not the Porter-Sesnon property."

The Widera property, named after the former property owners, is a narrow strip of land along the McGregor Drive frontage road on the other side of New Brighton Road from the Porter-Sesnon property.

"Plan A was denied," Powell-Murray said. "My gut reaction is that there were (only) seven precincts that Wingspread carried in 1988. The county spoke very strongly that they wanted a state park."

Negotiations between Kelley and state negotiators have stalled over the price to be paid for the property if the state were to buy it for a park.

Aptos-Capitola Supervisor Robley Levy said this morning she wasn't surprised by the filing.

"But I hope he'll pursue the state park purchase," she said. "It is clear that is the public in Santa Cruz County wants."

Santa Cruz County Supervisor Gary Patton, a foe of the old Wingspread project, said the new development application should be a message to state Sen. Henry Mello and Assemblyman Sam Farr to deliver on their promises and find the money needed to buy the property.

Patton declined to make a specific comment on the Meadowpark application, adding "everyone has the right to go through the process."

But he added, "Our general plan and local coastal plan say that the first priority is an acquisition to make it part of the New Brighton Beach State Park.

"If he has filed it, then Mr. Farr and Mr. Mello should redouble their efforts. It is on our list to buy the property and our legislators should deliver the money to buy this property."

"I am convinced in my mind that the state thinks this is an important acquisition."

The supervisors do, too. The county has offered \$500,000 in park acquisition funds to help acquire the land.

"The money is still there and we have not retracted our willingness to participate," Patton said. "Tens of thousands of people have expressed their opinions on the property (in the June, 1988 elec-

tion) and it is now time for some action."

The state originally appropriated \$4 million to purchase the land. HBK principal Ryland Kelley reportedly wanted \$10 million for his interest in the property.

Mello said this morning that the \$4 million in the state budget was taken out after Kelley gave the state a letter last summer, stating that the property had been taken off the market.

"My own personal view is that it is a very important piece of prop-

erty for the state to purchase," Mello said. "The state should really own it for future expansion of New Brighton Beach State Park and we could also work with county and city for future recreation. But the last formal word is that the property is off the market."

In any case, Powell-Murray is promising a hot reception for the Meadowpark plan.

"We are ready and willing to approach the next round," she said.