

Wingspread Developer Suggests A Mix Of Housing And Parkland

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The 67 acre Porter-Sesnon property which sits like an open space heartland in Santa Cruz County may end up split, with part of it going for private housing and part to the state for an addition to New Brighton State Beach Park.

Ryland Kelley, the principal in Hare, Brewer and Kelley developing company, which holds a 99-year lease on the property from the University of California, has suggested the partial purchase to state Park Director Peter Dangermond.

The park director in recent interviews has indicated the state may indeed buy only part of the parcel. He told The Sentinel that "the \$4 million may not be enough to acquire the entire property" and that the state parks staff is negotiating "to buy all, or part, of the parcel."

State project manager for Porter-Sesnon Warren Westrup has taken Kelley's suggestion seriously, saying he considers it "a proposal" from the developer.

Kelley said it was only a suggestion and that "Mr. Westrup has a lively imagination."

However, Kelley also said that there's at least one seven-acre parcel that's contiguous but not joined to the main section that might be sold to the state.

It is believed that the lease which was signed a few years back cost the private developer \$1.5 million.

Westrup said the property acquisition from the university system would be of minor importance and may come later "as the real worth of the property — 99 percent of its worth — is in the lease."

Kelley and company wanted to build over 600 housing units and a performing arts center with surrounding commercial structures. The project was called Wingspread.

That proposal was eroded in the public battle that ensued until the property now is being downzoned to either 115-130 recreation campsites or the same number of homes.

Kelley says that Wingspread's wings have not been terminally clipped and points to an environmental impact report that is scheduled for delivery in the next week or so.

The report is being done by an outside consultant firm and includes an environmental assessment of the Wingspread project along with lesser alternatives.

Kelley says that if the EIR shows the Wingspread project can be absorbed by the neighborhood and the county, then it should be reconsidered.

One recent monkey wrench was thrown into the negotiations by Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Monterey, who Thursday told the Capitola City Council, "With so many properties with willing sellers throughout the state, I think the state would simply find someone else who wants to sell."

His remark brought a sharp rebuke from state Parks Commissioner Victorial Gibson who said it also "startled and disappointed me."

She pointed out that Farr "does not speak for the commission" and that "the commission has consistently given it (Porter-Sesnon) high priority as a use for bond money."

Farr said he got the impression from Dangermond that the state would not vigorously pursue purchase if Kelley turned down the \$4 million offer.

Kelley all along has been saying the lease is not for sale and there had been no break in that position until his suggestion for partial sale was made.

Farr explained, "I've known Peter (Dangermond) since he was hired by our board of supervisors to work in Monterey and the information just came in conversation with him."

He said Dangermond said the state would not vigorously pursue, or use litigation, to force the lease out of Kelley's hands.

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Dangermond would not directly contradict Farr, saying it was "inappropriate" for him to censure the assemblyman, but he did say the state was going to the negotiating table with serious intent.

He said, "I don't know if the \$4 million will be enough for the entire property."

Dangermond said that condemnation has only been used twice in the two years he's been director and both instances were for small parcels to attach to major acquisitions.

While Farr's statement "disappointed" Gibson, it was hailed by some supporters of the private development. One of them said, "Sam did in one minute what we've been trying to do for months."

Those supporters have wanted state parks to agree to some private use, possibly coupled with some state use, so that the park department's voice of approval could be used persuasively at the county and state levels where coastal permits will be approved.

However, Dangermond made it clear that his department is not concerned with "doing the county's land use planning" and said it would wait until the land use decisions had been made.

Gibson indicated that the county's downzoning would have an impact on the price, saying, "What is a lease worth that has only 115 campsights?"

The sale of Porter-Sesnon is scheduled for hearing sometime this fall.