

Wingspread

Latest plans for controversial project

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STAFF WRITER

Developer Ryland Kelley unveiled his revised Wingspread Beach conference center plans at a press conference yesterday and presented the new design as a "significant reduction" in size.

Kelley has undertaken the comprehensive redesign in an effort to meet a long list of conditions required for final approval of plans to build a conference center, performing-arts complex and recreation center.

The redesign, which Kelley hopes will be the final version of the project, comes six years after the developer introduced his first Wingspread proposal and entered an emotional battle over the use of the beachfront Porter Sesnon property in Aptos.

"It is very true design evolves through a process," Kelley said in the Aptos offices of his Palo Alto-based firm, Hare, Brewer and Kelley, where he sat in a caned chair. The wall behind him held architect's conceptual drawings of Wingspread's proposed luxury condominiums.

"The longer you're with something the better it gets," Kelley said. "We have a better project (than originally planned) in every way."

He said he's confident the revised plans meet the rigorous conditions Santa Cruz County supervisors imposed on the project when they tentatively approved it in March. But, he said, he hopes one requirement largely beyond his control will be considered separately.

The conditions, recommended by Aptos-Captola Supervisor Robley Levy, and approved by a 3-2 vote of the county board, call for, among other things, a reduction in the number of rental units by 20 percent and a redesign of the performing-arts complex to do away with an experimental "dome" design and create more conventional theaters.

Levy also requested Kelley pay his share of a pedestrian overpass to link Wingspread with Cabrillo College, install lighting on the Aptos High School football field and provide direct freeway access to the project.

It's this last requirement, which calls for the approval of the state Department of Transportation, that Kelley hopes can

be detached from the rest of the project.

In all other respects, however, Kelley said he's met and, in some cases, exceeded the supervisors' demands.

Kelley's original plans called for 295 "double lock-out" condominiums that could be converted into nearly 600 rental units. The new plan shows 468 condominiums in more traditional hotel-suite layout.

unveiled

The reduction in the size and number of rental units has resulted in a 30 percent reduction in the overall "footprint," or square footage, of the development. Under the new plan, 93 percent of the 72 acres of oceanfront property will remain free of buildings. The



Kurt Ellison

Developer Ryland Kelley explains his latest Wingspread Beach development plan. See Page 15 for details.

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land includes the Porter Sesnon property Kelley controls through a long-term lease with the University of California, and the adjoining 7-acre Widera property he owns outright.

The new theater design includes three conventional

go-ahead plan approval and to be dealt with in the future when and if it is determined they are feasible."

He described the on-ramp requirement as an "all-win" situation.

"It's our view the amount of traffic generated by the project does not generate a need for a freeway condition," but, he said "we're still willing to do the freeway connection because we feel it enhances the hotel operation."

Kelley said the project's smaller footprint creates a "more favorable" spacial relationship between the theaters, conference center, 360-unit Sea Lodge, the 108-unit Meadow Lodge and the recreation area, which will include a club, pool and eight tennis courts.

The new layout provides more marketing flexibility in that it allows him to more easily target isolated segments of the tourism market, Kelley said. For example, Kelley said he would be able to offer a cul-

time Wingspread is built the demand for such facilities in Santa Cruz County will be strong enough to make it economically viable.

His firm is now negotiating with a consultant to analyze the financial feasibility of the project. A study will be necessary for Kelley to obtain financing for the project, as well as final approval from the county.

Kelley said he expects to finance the project through conventional means. Though he may consider applying for a lower-interest state loan, funded through bonds issued by the state Coastal Conservancy.

"That's one of the possibilities," Kelley said. "It's not clear right now the extent of these fundings might be available. We're not counting on financing other than through traditional mortgage financing. That and other cash-equity funds we traditionally bring into projects."

Kelley's plan must now undergo further review by the county, including further environmental review, approval by the county Planning Commission and final approval by the Board of Supervisors. It will then go to the California Coastal Commission for approval.

Kelley must also negotiate the details of his agreement to give over his lease on the Porter Sesnon property to the county in case that plan is finally adopted. The county would accept the gift on the condition that Kelley would develop Wingspread and run it as a concession.

According to County Administrative Officer George Newell, the gift proposal could yield the county a quarter-billion dollars in 50 years.

Kelley is also very likely to face legal challenges by a coalition that has bitterly opposed the project from the start.

The coalition has threatened to sue the county if it accepts Kelley's gift. The opponents claim the act would violate a tentatively adopted ordinance preventing the county's financial participation in the project.

The opponents have also threatened to appeal if the Coastal Commission approves the plan.

Such lawsuits, said Kelley "could delay the project. We're not concerned about the outcome."

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theaters and increased storage and backstage areas. The largest theater would seat 1,000 people and the second, 500. The third would be a "black box" for experimental productions and rehearsals, Kelley said.

"We've acceded to the criticism of the dome style. We would still prefer the dome for several reasons, one of which is economy," Kelley said. "Another is, it's unique energy-saving qualities are worthwhile. We felt it could have a superb acoustical surface."

Kelley said the lower density of the project would result in a 17 percent reduction in traffic compared to the old plan. That and required improvements to Seaciff and Park Avenue freeway interchanges will obviate the need for a direct freeway access to and from Wingspread, Kelley said.

But, he added, if the supervisors insist on the condition, he'll do his best to meet it. He said he expects the condition to be "separated from the basic

tural package, centered on the performing-arts center, to cater to people craving a theater or music festival. At the same time, he could offer a recreation package to the "fitness-wellness" crowd at the Meadow Lodge and nearby recreation center.

Kelley said the resort's favorable location would also enable him to market the resort as a convenient vacation get-away.

"All the segments add up to a sounder base for room occupation," Kelley said.

A high occupancy rate is key to both Kelley's financial success and to providing the county a healthy revenue from the project.

Kelley said the revisions, which cut the number of rentable units, have added considerably to his building costs. But he said the development is still financially feasible.

"We've had to look very carefully at it and the equation balances," Kelley said.

He calculates that by the