County shrugs off latest challenge to Wingspread

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Opponents of the Wingspread project have mounted another court challenge in their seven-year fight to stop the condominium and conference center proposed for the Porter Sesnon property in Aptos. But Santa Cruz County officials say the latest challenge is an empty one.

The opponents have appealed the decision of County Environmental Coordinator Sue Williamson, who has concluded that the project does not require further, lengthy environmental review.

The appeal, filed by lawyers on behalf of the group called Friends of Porter Sesnon, asks the Planning Commission to review Williamson's decision.

Williamson, however, said county lawyers have said the decision cannot be appealed according to procedures established by California environmental law.

The latest skirmish in the long-running controversy arose when Williamson determined in early April that an environmental impact report conducted in 1985 sufficiently analyzed the project.

According to attorneys Celia Scott-Von der Muhll and Mitchell Page, however, substantial changes in the project call for a new environmental review. The changes include bigger restaurant, conference center and parking areas, as well as the county's decision to become financial partners in the project, they said in a letter dated April 15.

Williamson said she will have county lawyers re-evaluate the issue in light of the recent letter from Page and Scott-Von der Muhll. If the lawyers maintain their original assessment, "the county stance will probably be it can't be appealed."

In that case, Williamson said, she will recommend that the project go back to the Board of Supervisors for a public hearing and final review. As part of that review, the supervisors will make a final decision on whether the environmental review has been sufficient.