

Wingspread foes mark start of ballot fight

By STEVE SHENDER
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SANTA CRUZ — Vowing that "Santa Cruz County can't be bought," opponents of the Wingspread Beach project Thursday kicked off their campaign to defeat a ballot measure authorizing the Aptos development.

Meanwhile, Mitchell Page, a Santa Cruz attorney who has represented Wingspread foes in their eight-year battle with Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley, indicated that he will soon file a lawsuit challenging the legality of the countywide referendum, which will appear as Measure A on the June ballot.

Page said Measure A runs

interest in the Porter-Sesnon property, at no cost to the county."

Page contends that even if voters approve the deal, the proposed gift-lease arrangement would violate the county's self-imposed prohibition on financial participation in the Wingspread project. Thursday he said he'll take his case to court before the June 7 vote on Measure A.

Page said he doubted that the courts would agree to consider his challenge before the election. But he said he was concerned that if the legal issue is not raised now, and Measure A passes, the courts might refuse to consider it later.

Kelley wants to develop a 468-

unit hotel, conference center and performing arts complex on the Porter-Sesnon site. Opponents want the property annexed to the neighboring state park. The state stands ready to buy the Porter-Sesnon land with \$4 million in park bond funds, but Kelley, who leased the property from the University of California for \$1.75 million in 1978, has said he has no interest in selling.

Wingspread supporters say that if the project is turned down, Kelley, who has alternate plans to build either a 197-room lodge or an RV park and clubhouse, will "pursue his legal right" to develop the Porter-Sesnon site. All the defeat of Measure A will do, they say, is deprive the coun-

ty of a performing arts center and millions of dollars in lease revenues.

Cherie Bobbe, spokeswoman for the Committee Against Measure A, Thursday discounted that talk as "an idle threat, equivalent to a temper tantrum."

Bobbe also said that Wingspread opponents would not be cowed by the size of the Yes on A Committee's campaign war-chest. Yes on A chairman Rowland Rebele said Monday that his committee — backed by the developer — would spend "tens of thousands of dollars" on its campaign for Measure A. In answer to a question, Rebele acknowledged that the committee's spending might exceed the

\$100,000 mark.

Thursday, as Bobbe and about 20 other Wingspread foes stood on the steps of the county courthouse, she said, "We're here to let Wingspread and its supporters know that this county is one place that can't be bought." Meanwhile, vowed Bobbe, "We will spend whatever we need to reach the people with the facts."

Bobbe said Wingspread would create a "horrendous traffic problem" in mid-county. She said prospects for the Wingspread project's financial success were uncertain, raising the possibility that the county might be saddled with a white elephant. And she said the project would reduce "our use of the Porter-Sesnon

meadow ... from 66 acres to an eight-foot paved path and one small observation deck with a 28-foot looming structure butting up against it."

Although the Porter-Sesnon land has always been in private ownership, local residents have routinely trespassed on the property to jog, hike and walk their dogs.

Kelley's project would cover about 20 percent of the Porter-Sesnon property and adjacent six-acre Widera parcel with buildings, roads, pathways and parking lots, according to Wingspread supporters. The remaining 80 percent of the land, they say, would remain in open space.