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Wingspread developer speaks his mind

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SANTA CRUZ — The fate of the proposed Wingspread Beach convention center / performing arts complex lies in the hands of Supervisor Robley Levy, according to Wingspread developer Ry Kelley.

Apparently, Kelley believes the development proposed for Aptos will be backed by the two conservative board members — Dan Forbus and E. Wayne Moore Jr. — and sees Levy as the third, critical vote on the five-member board.

Kelley was in town Wednesday to discuss his proposal with members of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce's Economic Concerns Committee.

"Mrs. Levy's decision is a significant one in this case and she's made it clear her judgement will be based on the ability of the property to handle development and (on) the lack of major impact on the county's resources and, of course, on the trade-offs of various benefits involved," Kelley stated.

"That decision is going to be made by her in the context of public expressions by you and by others," Kelley told the group of businessmen and businesswomen.

The controversial project is proposed for Levy's second (Capitola-Aptos) district on the 67-acre Porter-Sesnon site across Highway 1 from Cabrillo College.

Kelley's firm of Hare, Brewer and Kelley recently scaled down its original proposal and

has made two new proposals to the county.

One proposal is for the development density allowed by the county General Plan and the Local Coastal Program. It would involve building 200, 600-square-foot motel units and convention facilities, but no performing arts center.

The other proposal is for more and much larger units than the General Plan and Local Coastal Program allow. Under this proposal, the firm would build 295, 1,275-square-foot motel units to serve the convention facilities and would construct a performing arts complex.

The performing arts complex then would be turned over free of charge to the recently-formed Wingspread Foundation. This foundation, made up of local citizens and people from throughout the nation interested in the arts, would own and operate the complex.

Kelley told The Sentinel that his firm plans to apply for amendments to the General Plan and Local Coastal Program for this second alternative, while at the same time pursuing the first proposal.

That way, he said, if the amendments are turned down, the firm will go with the first proposal.

During his talk before members of the business community, Kelley said his firm would need the larger, more numerous units in order to support the construction of the large theater complex.

John Cone, the consultant who did the economic impact analysis of the project for the draft environmental impact report, told the

group the second alternative could mean \$1.3 million in annual income to the county and special districts.

This money would come from the occupancy tax charged to motel operators by the county.

In addition, the developers plan to charge another tax on the rooms that will be used to support the theater complex, Cone said.

While Cone analyzed the original, larger proposal by Hare, Brewer & Kelley, he seemed confident that even a smaller project would be quite profitable to local government.

Kelley also appeared confident that Wingspread would even calm the environmental concerns of Levy and others.

"We are confident and I have great comfort that the draft environmental impact as prepared by the county clearly identifies there is no significant environmental impacts in our original proposal," Kelley stated.

And, he noted, a scaled-down development will mean scaled down impacts the firm will have to resolve, such as those on traffic.

"A careful analysis of the reduced development will convince you there are no adverse environmental impacts," he added.

The developer is counting on the support of local cultural groups for the performing arts complex. If that support is not forthcoming, he has said in the past, he won't pursue the theater complex.

Several representatives of cultural groups were in the audience Wednesday, but not a one breathed a word.