

Not on the wing as yet

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Project faces more hurdles

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SANTA CRUZ — Though Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley's Wingspread Beach project has been approved by the county Board of Supervisors, it's likely to be some time before a shovelful of earth is turned for the controversial development.

Supervisors voted 3-2 Tuesday to approve Wingspread "in concept." In turn, Kelley will have to agree to incorporate a number of potentially expensive modifications demanded by the board into the project's design.

And the mandated changes, their impact on the environment, and measures needed to reduce or "mitigate" those environmental impacts, will have to be reviewed by both the county's environmental coordinator and the Planning Commission.

Meanwhile, Kelley and the county will have to come to terms on an agreement assuring that Wingspread will indeed deliver all of the public benefits Kelley has promised during the course of the prolonged struggle over the development.

There is no precedent locally for the pending "development agreement" — an idea so new to the county that supervisors will have to pass an ordinance authorizing officials to negotiate it. And no one can say for certain at this point how the bargaining between the two sides will go.

Even after Kelley consents to make the required design changes and reaches a development accord with the county — assuming he does — and the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors hold more hearings on the agreement and re-designed project and vote final approval of them, there will be yet one more hurdle for Wingspread. The project lies in the coastal zone, and changes in the county's Local Coastal Program will be needed to accommodate the development. Those changes will have to win approval from the state Coastal Commission.

In short, Kelley still has a long road to travel; one that's full of potential pitfalls.

Nevertheless, the developer

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Wednesday pronounced himself "elated" with the Board of Supervisors' decision.

"It really sets us up, for the first time, in a positive perspective of trying to solve detailed problems of accommodating the community," he said in a phone interview.

Kelley, who said he hadn't yet had time to examine the board's conditions in detail, called them "solvable problems," and said he was looking forward to discussing them with county officials.

"I hope the economic viability of the project can be retained and that the design changes will not cause any problems," he said.

One of the "design changes" imposed by the board — at the insistence of Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy — was a 20-percent reduction in the number of condominium units (from 590 to 472) on the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property.

Levy and fellow-supervisors Dan Forbus and E. Wayne Moore Jr. also required Kelley to redesign his proposed three-hall performing arts complex and eliminate the facility's dome shapes in favor of a more conventional and, most likely, more expensive design.

And they required the developer to construct freeway on- and off-ramps directly linking Wingspread with Highway 1, and pay for a pedestrian link between the development and Cabrillo College.

Kelley spokesman Tim Welch Wednesday estimated that the design changes would add somewhere between \$5.5 million and \$9.5 million to the cost of the project.

He was unable to say if the project could survive the increased costs in face of the reduction in condominium revenues which the loss of 118 units would likely entail.

Levy, who cast the deciding vote on Wingspread Tuesday, said she would not support the project without the changes, and especially not without direct freeway access, which she said was necessary to reduce the development's impact on neighborhood traffic.

The next step in the long Wingspread saga will come in three weeks, when the county counsel, county administrative officer and planning staff are to return to the board with a complete schedule for all further studies, reviews and actions needed prior to final county approval of the development.