

# Wingspread vote: Supervisors reject Plan A

By ADRIANA REYNERI  
STAFF WRITER

Developer Ryland Kelley last Tuesday night lost a drawn-out struggle for Santa Cruz County approval of one of his two proposals for developing the Porter Sesnon property in Aptos.

The Board of Supervisors

contracts with the developer, would manage the sports and cultural facilities.

The commission found the public benefits in Plan B outweighed any negative effects it would have.

Tuesday night, however, consultants hired by Friends of Porter-Sesnon questioned

"tremendous" promises Kelley was making to the community. He cautioned that the costs of public benefits and environmental mitigations associated with Plan B would likely raise the selling prices of the time-share condominiums and rates of the rentals. The higher-than-market-rate prices might slow sales or reduce occupancy, he said.

"If you're going to stay here, are you willing to pay extra to be near the performing arts center and playing fields?" Recht asked.

The economist also questioned Kelley's prediction of a 75 to 80 percent occupancy rate. Other hotels in the area run 40 percent to 60 percent full, he noted.

Kelley's numbers assume Wingspread will draw 5 percent of the hotel trade in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, and an even larger share, 30 percent, of the culturally-oriented tourists.

"Can they capture that many culturally-oriented tourists?" he asked. "The information currently available doesn't yet provide a basis to prove this plan is feasible."

He warned the county that public-private partnerships usually involve continually evolving negotiations and compromise on the part of the public.

Levy, the acknowledged swing vote on Wingspread, said the consultants hired by Friends of Porter-Sesnon raised some "very significant" questions.

She said, "I really suspect the proposed contribution (less than \$8 million) is not sufficient to build the kind of hall the county needs."

She added, "I think the issue of whether the thing can economically fly is a real important one."

The supervisor also said that several other questions remain unanswered. They include mitigating traffic impacts and setting appropriate parking requirements for the facility.

Levy said she believed the proposed dome design might be problematic.

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— Robley Levy

rejected without discussion the proposal known as Plan A, then held the first of at least two public hearings on Plan B, the larger of the two proposals — both called Wingspread Beach — to develop the 66 acres of property that borders New Brighton State Beach across the freeway from Cabrillo College.

Friends of Porter-Sesnon, a coalition opposing all the Wingspread proposals, used last week's forum to raise serious questions about Kelley's ability to deliver all the goods he's promised in Plan B.

The board, on a motion by Aptos-Capitola Supervisor Robley Levy, unanimously rejected the developer's appeal of the Planning Commission's denial of Plan A.

The commission in November had rejected the smaller Plan A, which proposes a conference center and 197 condominium rentals. The commissioners found Plan A violated county laws limiting building, land use and traffic. They judged the benefits of the plan were not great enough to offset its detriments.

The commission, however, in a 3-2 vote swung by Levy's appointee, Ree Burnap, recommended the board approve Plan B. The larger plan proposes a conference center, up to 585 rentals, as well as three public playing fields, a performing arts center, and public parking and trails to the beach. Local foundations, through special

Kelley's ability to deliver many of the benefits he's promised.

John Dykstra, an urban planner based in Oakland, critiqued several aspects of the performing arts proposal.

Kelley has proposed building a performing arts center with three halls — a 200-seat hall for experimental performances, a 500-seat hall for dramatic performances, and a 1,000-seat hall for musical productions. Kelley has contracted with the Wingspread Arts Foundation, a local group, to manage the center. He proposes subsidizing the performing arts program with a percentage of room rental revenue.

Kelley has offered to spend less than \$8 million on the center, but Dykstra said it would take at least \$11.4 million to build the first-class type of center needed to draw an out-of-town audience.

Dykstra said the center would probably be too small to support large-scale musical productions, such as the ballet or opera. He also questioned the appropriateness of the dome-shaped design Kelley has proposed for the halls.

Dykstra also noted that it usually takes several years for a performing arts program, such as the Ashland, Ore., Shakespeare Festival, to earn a widespread reputation and attract a regional or national audience.

J. Richard Recht, an Oakland urban economist, noted the

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"I have no love lost for the domes. I don't personally or esthetically admire them," she said.

A last-minute proposal, a modified Plan B, dubbed Plan C, or Plan B-1, has complicated the Wingspread picture. The proposal was contained in a report by the County Administrative Office analyzing the public benefits of Plan B requested by the board more than two years ago.

The latest plan is the result of negotiations between members of the county Administrative Office and Kelley, who forged the plan during several meetings held over the last six weeks.

Plan C proposes an innovative financing scheme that requires the county to buy Kelley's long-term lease with the state on the

Board Chairman Gary Patton, however, criticized Newell's "creative" approach to analyzing the public benefits of Plan B.

Wednesday, he expanded on those remarks.

"The CAO (County Administrative Officer) was directed to do an analysis of the plan that was submitted to us. He went far beyond that and obviously had a series of private meetings with Ryland Kelly and sat down and negotiated another proposal which he boldly calls Plan C. He never asked the board would you like me to try to get a better deal. To me, he was not doing what we told him to do, he was doing what we wanted to do. He was acting as if he was the Board of Supervisors."

Patton also said he thought Newell's analysis of the merits

Messiah for the Santa Cruz economy without the numbers to back it up.

"He's just sort of jumping on the bandwagon and saying here's a chance to make a buck. These kinds of projects don't automatically make money. I think frankly our CAO is naive. We asked him to do a sophisticated analysis and what it ends up being is the Music Man comes to town. What Kelley is sucking our CAO into is helping him establish a high price for the land."

Richard Allen, an attorney representing Kelley, said it was too soon to tell whether the developers would sue the county over what the developer maintains is a wrongful denial of Plan A.

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property, then lease the land back to him. In turn, the developer would build a modified Plan B and run it as a county concession.

The modified plan proposes 60 fewer rental units and additional amenities, such as a youth hostel, additional public camping spaces and additional revenue for local arts and cultural foundations.

County Administrative Officer George Newell has heralded Plan C as containing "unprecedented" public benefits, including annual revenue of as much as \$2.5 million for the county.

The board, however, chose not to review the new proposal last week. It decided instead to keep to the prearranged hearing schedule for Plan A (now out the window) and Plan B.

of Plan B was "very dubious."

"The number of unanswered questions in his proposal is staggering," Patton said. "He's presented it as the return of the