

Final report: Say no to Wingspread

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A staff report for the California Coastal Commission recommends denying approval of the controversial Wingspread project.

The report, authored by staffers in the Coastal Commission regional office in Santa Cruz, says the proposed 468 hotel units with conference space, performing arts center and health club would generate too much traffic and cover too much of the 66.5 acre Porter-Sesnon site, located on an ocean bluff opposite Highway 1 from Cabrillo College.

The State Coastal Commission is expected to vote on Wingspread Feb. 26 in a meeting at Marina del Rey.

Developer Ryland Kelley, who proposed the project, said he had expected the negative report.

"The local office (of the Coastal Commission) is a totally politicized collection," Kelley said.

Referring to the report's claims on density, Kelley said, "There isn't a state park in existence that isn't more intense than this."

Dan Forbus, one of the three supervisors who voted to approve Wingspread, agreed the report was predictable.

"It's a typical Coastal Commission report: Don't put anything anywhere," said Forbus. "I think the report was what they wanted to say, not factually what the land can stand."

Supervisor Robley Levy, who cast the deciding vote for Wingspread, said she had not yet seen the report and refused to comment until she had.

Coastal Commission Executive Director Edward Brown said commission staffers were particularly concerned about the project's effect on recreation areas in Capitola and Rio del Mar.

The Capitola City Council recently called for denial of the project because of the adverse effects it might have on Capitola.

Brown emphasized that the commission staffers did not oppose the concept of a performing arts center for the county, one of the big selling points of the project.

"The report in no way carves out a position on the community's need for a performing arts center," Brown said. "My personal feeling as a native Santa Cruzan is we need a performing arts center, and we should continue to look around the community for a site."

Besides density and traffic, the report criticizes the Wingspread project for:

- Failing to assure protection and provision of recreational uses for the nearby beach.

- Diminishing public access to the Porter-Sesnon site from what it is now.

- Failing to provide "lower cost" recreation facilities.

- Tampering with too many

natural land forms.

- Failing to assure permanent public access.

The last finding derives from the peculiar and complex lease status of the Porter-Sesnon property. It is owned by the University of California, but leased for 99 years to Kelley's development firm, which plans to turn over the lease to the county. The county would lease the property back to Kelley in the hope of making a profit from the rent, which is tied in part to occupancy rates of the proposed hotel.

The commission report says that because the university can reclaim the land when the master lease expires, permanent public access to the beach cannot be guaranteed.

Kelley disputed this finding, however.

"The public access and parking are not part of the UC property," he said. "They're on another piece of property that we bought to augment the site."

He said he was willing to deed that land to the county permanently.

The commission report says denying Wingspread still leaves choices for developing the site.

Those include getting the state Department of Parks and Recreation to buy the property and add it to nearby New Brighton State Beach; turning the land into a county regional park with public recreation facilities, a trail system and a campground or motel with 115 to 130 units; developing a smaller hotel (115 to 130 units) with conference rooms, public access and a 15-acre community park; or a combination state park and community park and 115 to 130 units in a campground or motel.

The staff report says that a maximum of 130 rooms is all the county's local coastal plan allows in the area.

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
Register-PAJARONIAN
February 12, 1988