

Latest Wingspread plan gets tongue-lashing

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By STEVE SHENDER

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — County supervisors Tuesday set Feb. 11 as the date for a hearing on a proposed lease/lease-back deal with Porter-Sesnon developer Ryland Kelley, but not before two of their number blistered County Administrative Officer George Newell for suggesting that the county become a partner in Kelley's controversial Wingspread project, and a third said he had doubts about the proposal.

Newell was asked more than a year ago by the board to analyze the public benefits of Wingspread Plan B, which calls for construction of 295 subdividable condominium units, a conference center, three-hall performing arts complex and a number of tennis courts and athletic fields on the 66-acre parcel adjacent to New Brighton Beach State Park in Aptos.

A public hearing on Plan B is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at Aptos High School.

Instead of a public benefits analysis on Plan B, the CAO returned two weeks ago with a new plan, which he said would net the county nearly \$27 million in concession fees over 10 years and would raise more than \$14 million for performing arts and \$2.7 million for the Santa Cruz County Arts Museum, Cultural Council, Land Trust and Historical Preservation Society over the same period.

Under Newell's plan, the county would purchase Kelley's 99-year lease on the Porter-Sesnon land and buy outright an adjoining six-acre parcel owned by the Palo Alto developer. Kelley would then lease the land back from the county for 50 years.

Kelley indicated last week that the proposal, similar to one the developer tried — unsuccessfully — to sell to state parks officials last year, had been Newell's idea.

"We did not bring that plan to the county; the county came to us after they had participated in the (state) talks," Kelley said.

Called "Plan C" by Newell and dubbed "Plan B-1" by Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy, the proposal bombed with board Chairman Gary Patton, who Tuesday reiterated earlier-stated criticism of the CAO.

Newell, Patton said, "was never invited or requested by the board to suggest we go into partnership on Porter-Sesnon. That was uncalled for."

Joining Patton in criticizing Newell Tuesday was Fifth District Supervisor Joe Cucchiara.

"The board, on a 5-0 vote, directed that we get a piece of information (a benefit analysis of Plan B) that it appears like we're not going to have," he said. "What we have is a report that was not directed by the board."

Cucchiara said the CAO's office "took it upon itself to go out and

create a ... new project that involves county participation."

South county Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. said that Newell's plan contained "some fundamental things that go against my grain." Said Moore, "I'm not even sure where I'm at on Plan C."

While Patton and Cucchiara were miffed and Moore was confused about the CAO's handling of the Wingspread public benefits study Tuesday, Live Oak Supervisor Dan Forbus welcomed Newell's report.

"Given ... where we are

financially, and the needs the county has, and the way this board likes to spend money on everything that comes along," he said, "the CAO would have been remiss without giving us that report on this development."

"The document is a good one. There's a lot of good discussion and a lot of good factual information in there, if the board wants to take it — and it's (still) good if the board doesn't want to," Forbus said.

"I think I see the chair (Patton) with an intent to sluff this off, but it's

not going to go away and it's not going to sluff that easily."

Supervisor Levy raised the issue of Newell's report anew Tuesday when she asked board members to amend the agenda for next week's hearing to make room for a 20-minute staff presentation on the document and a 20-minute response from Wingspread opponents, Friends of Porter-Sesnon.

All of Levy's fellow supervisors agreed, however, that the board should schedule a separate hearing to consider the report.