

# Wingspread goes to voters

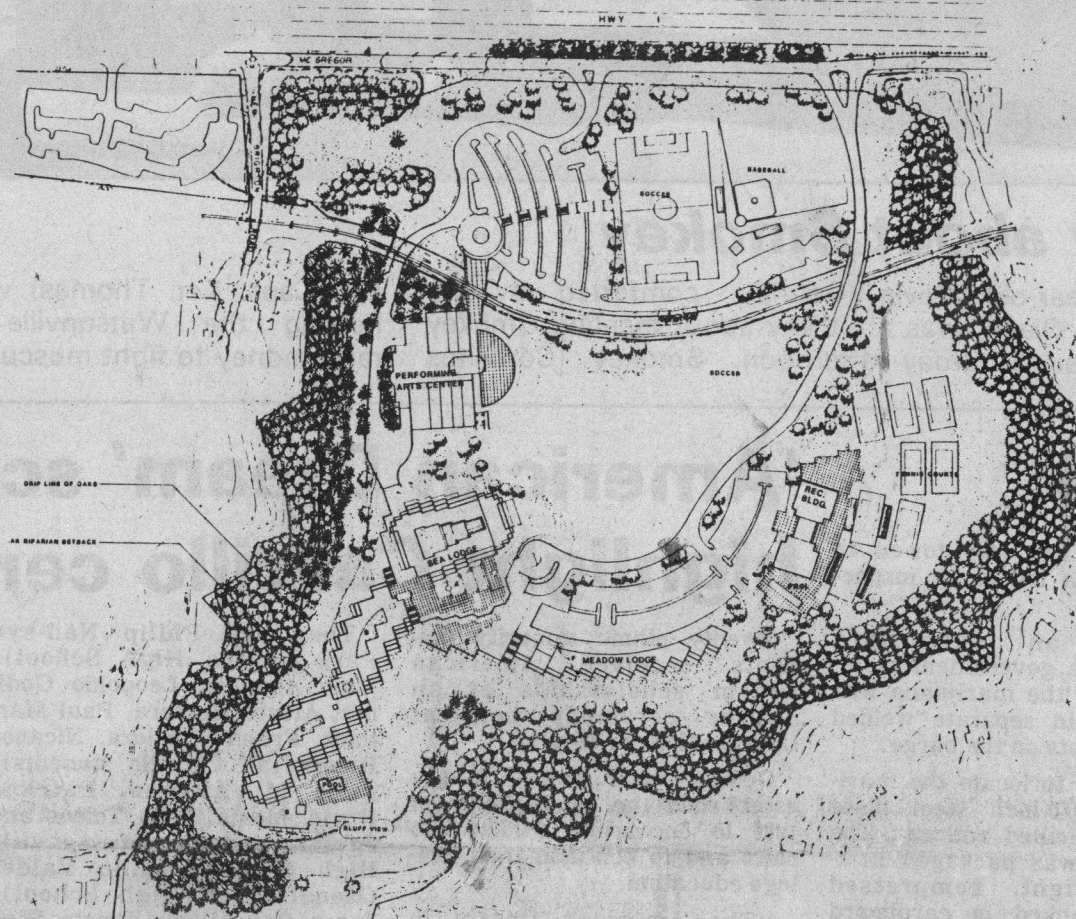
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On June 7, every registered voter in Santa Cruz County will have the chance to weigh in with his or her opinion on that nine-year-old controversy, the proposed Wingspread hotel-conference center-performing arts complex.

Voters who support the Wingspread project will vote "yes" on Measure A; those who oppose it will cast "no" votes. While the vote is purely an advisory one, county supervisors have vowed to abide by the voters' decision. A "no" vote would almost certainly kill the project, but an affirmative vote would not necessarily assure its construction because final approval of the project would have to come from the state Coastal Commission.

If the voters turn thumbs down on Wingspread, it appears likely that the 66-acre meadow known as the Porter Sesnon property — which lies next to New Brighton State Beach — will either become the site of a campground, a camp for recreational vehicles or a motel.

There is a very slim chance — backed by no cash, and basically a chance only because nothing is sure in this world — that somehow the meadow would remain open space, which is the ardent desire of many of Wingspread's opponents. But



Drawing shows proposed Wingspread project on Porter Sesnon parcel.

even the county's local coastal plan calls for either a campground or a 130-room motel at the site.

It is true, as Wingspread opponents claim, that the State Parks Department would like to buy the Porter Sesnon property. In 1980, the department set aside \$4 million from bond funds for the

property. That money, invested at interest, is still earmarked for Porter Sesnon, said Ross Henry, the department's chief of planning and local assistance.

If the parks department could get developer Ryland Kelley to sell the lease on the property, it would establish a campground, Henry confirmed. (Meanwhile, because

the property's assessed value has increased since 1980, the parks department would have to find a few more million to buy it now, Henry said).

For the property to remain as open space, probably the

county itself would have to buy it — for however many millions it's now worth. The cash is clearly not there.

Meanwhile, developer Kelley has vowed that if the voters turn down Wingspread at the polls he will create a "Winnebago wonderland by the sea" — an "RV park" as it is called in campaign literature, or, in more neutral terminology, a privately run campground for recreational vehicles.

Kelley might also opt to build the allowed size of motel, his spokesmen say.

Of what does the proposed Wingspread project consist? And what are its much-vaunted "public benefits"?

If it is finally approved, there would be a 468-room hotel, with conference space to accommodate 300 people; three restaurants; a health spa currently planned to be reserved for hotel guests; some shops; eight tennis courts (for guests) and two swimming pools.

Recognizing that the conference center alone would have a tough time winning county approval, Kelley has thrown in three theaters (with, respectively, 1,000 seats, 500 seats, and room for

200 folding chairs). These he will build at a total cost of \$12 million to \$14 million, including the value of the land.

Kelley will also build two soccer fields, one full-sized, one half-sized, and a baseball field. Another field, for softball, will be built somewhere else in the county at his expense, and he will pay the cost of installing lights at the Aptos High School athletic field.

Two parking lots will serve the development; a third will hold 126 spaces for beachgoers. A paved path will run through the property for beach access, and Kelley will give the county title to a stretch of beach adjacent to New Brighton State Beach.

Then come the financial promises: a minimum of \$1 million a year to the cash-strapped county as "rent" for the property in a complicated deal, in which Kelley turns over his 99-year lease on the property to the county, which will sell it back to him. (The University of California owns the site). Kelley will also pay \$750,000 in start-up costs for the theaters, and a minimum \$500,000 annual theater subsidy. All this money is to be generated from room rentals and conference fees at the hotel.

Many Wingspread opponents maintain the financial promises are so much pie-in-the-sky. They point out that the county has never commissioned an independent financial feasibility study of the project.

Pat Busch, assistant county administrative officer, acknowledged there has been no feasibility study. But he said his own projections show the hotel turning into a cash machine.

"There's no real way the county can lose on this," he said.

Postulating a \$130-a-night room rate and a 60 percent annual occupancy rate, the hotel alone would bring in \$13.3 million in gross revenues its first year, Busch said. That figure would easily