

Wilder folder

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Operation Wilder Issues A Charge

Operation Wilder, longtime foes of north coast development, charged Friday that city Planning Commissioner Reo Carr and Don Fultz, general manager of Wilder Ranch and Beaches, are "attempting to ignore proper governmental procedures in order to promote city approval for development of the Wilder Ranch and Beaches property rather than allowing the state to purchase it."

The California Legislature approved Thursday a \$9.45 billion budget that includes allocation of \$6 million for purchase of 3,500 acres of the Wilder 3,866.5-acre site.

"We support state purchase of this land for \$6 million," Al DiLudovico, Operation Wilder chairman, said on Friday.

DiLudovico said that Operation Wilder representatives and Dick Gregory from the People's Lobby testified in Sacramento before the Natural Resources Committee, urging state purchase of the park but not for the \$8 million proposed by State Senator Donald Grunsky, R-Watsonville.

In a group statement released by Kelly Garrett, an authorized spokesman, Operation Wilder referred to what it called "an ultimatum" given by Fultz to the planning commission last Wednesday.

The reference was to a statement by Fultz that he would recommend to Wilder Ranch and Beaches stockholders that they sell their acreage to the state unless the corporation can be given soon the chance to lay its general plan before the city for "honest debate and discussion."

Fultz said the development had been kept waiting for 11 months and that it could now be kept waiting for as long as two years more before the city completes three studies it has mandated prior to considering the Wilder proposals.

City Planner Phil Jones agreed at this meeting it may take two years for the city to do the mandated precise plan for the benchland, a traffic circulation study and a cost-benefits analysis.

Commenting on these Wednesday discussions, Garrett said in a release to the press:

"Fultz gave an ultimatum to the planning commission Wednesday night when he asked for a 'yes' or 'no' signal on his project by early July.

"At that meeting, Commissioner Carr said he believed that the city should 'shortcut some procedures,' because he felt 'deeply disturbed by the thought of the city losing control

of this area."

"Operation Wilder contends that such a 'signal' that Fultz wants is in essence asking the city to decide, before looking at any studies, on a project that has yet to be formally presented."

Furthermore, Garrett said, the group feels that the sense of urgency conveyed by Fultz was misleading.

"According to Harmon Howe of the parks and recreation department, the normal timetable for state land purchases doesn't call for direct negotiations with the property owners for at least three months."

Operation Wilder also branded as "misleading" Fultz' statement that the state offer would leave the firm with a loss of from \$1.5 to \$2.5 million.

"That's not an appropriate matter for the city to consider," Garrett said for the group. "There are procedures for changing the appraised value at the state level."

Operation Wilder said in response to Carr's concern that the city would lose control of the north coast to the state if the sale were made: "The city has never had control of the property and doesn't now. It is still in the county's unincorporated area."

Garrett concluded: "We keep hearing about how everyone wants open space but nobody wants to pay for it. Now we get an offer to preserve perhaps the most precious land we have and that it won't cost us a cent, but the city's reaction is to call a special conference in order to prevent that from happening."

Garrett referred to a special conference that was called Thursday by the city at Carr's request to consider possible speed-up of procedures to get the Wilder Plan considered quickly by the public and the city.

Invited to the meeting were Mayor Vernon Smith, Councilman Bert Muhly, Planning Commissioners Manfred Shaffer and Carr, City Manager David Koester and Fultz.

This meeting was cancelled, however, after it was learned other council members might attend. A conference of a quorum of council members on this matter in private would have been illegal under the Brown Act.

DiLudovico complimented Mayor Smith for calling off the conference and expressed hope on behalf of Operation Wilder that all discussions on the controversial project be public.