

Wingspread feud resumes; 'secret meeting' held

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Opponents of plans to develop the Porter Sesnon property in Aptos have charged that county and state officials held a secret meeting with the developer to work out some kind of deal. But those who were at the meeting say it was anything but secret, and no deals were made with the developer.

In a letter to the Board of Supervisors, Friends of Porter Sesnon Chairwoman Vickie A. Powell-Murray labeled as "secret" a meeting held in Sacramento the week of Sept. 9 between state parks officials, Sen. Henry Mello, Supervisor Robley Levy and Ryland Kelley, who is seeking approval for the development of the Porter Sesnon property.

Kelley has already submitted two proposals to Santa Cruz County to build develop the Porter Sesnon property next to New Brighton Beach. One proposal, Plan A, includes a conference facility and 197 condominiums for visitors.

Plan B, the larger proposal, includes a large performing arts center, a restaurant, shops, soccer and baseball fields and 295 condominiums.

Kelley has given the name of Wingspread Beach to his planned projects.

Although the county Planning Commission has held several hearings on Plan A, it has delayed making a decision until Plan A can be compared to Plan B. Both plans will be reviewed by the commission Oct. 16.

As Plans A and B are going through the planning process, Kelley has been working on a third alternative. That has been dubbed "Plan C," or "Asilomar for the Arts," referring to the Asilomar Conference Center near Monterey.

It's that proposal that was the subject of the meeting in Sacramento.

Sen. Mello has been pushing for the state to buy back the 99-year lease Kelley has on the Porter Sesnon property. The property is owned by the University of California, and Mello

believes it was a mistake for the state to have leased that land to a private party for such a long time.

Mello has already been successful in getting \$4 million set aside for the state parks department to buy the land, but Kelley has placed the value of the property at \$6.5 million.

Mello outlined what was discussed as part of the "Asilomar for the Arts" as follows:

The state would pay Kelley \$3.9 million now for the bulk of the 67-acre parcel. When the state gets another \$800,000, that would be paid to Kelley for the rest of the property.

The state would then turn around and lease the property back to Kelley, but only for 50 years, Mello said. The agreement also involves Kelley making a \$1 million gift to the state, and prepaying \$800,000 on his new lease.

Thus, Kelley would end up with \$4.7 million cash, and a shorter lease on the land he already is leasing now.

Mello said all these figures would likely change if the state goes ahead with it and has its

own appraisal done.

The plan under discussion also includes Kelley building Plan B, but reducing the number of condominiums by 20 percent. He would also put in 36 campsites for recreational vehicles, and a youth hostel would be built on the property.

Mello said nothing has been agreed upon, and it is up to the state parks department whether to pursue the purchase of the land. But no matter what happens, any proposal Kelley makes would have to go through the county's regular planning process, Mello said.

Supervisor Levy said she attended the meeting in Sacramento simply for information, and said she had not made any commitment to the proposal discussed.

Kelley's representative, Tim Welch, also said last week that no commitments were made at the meeting and that "Plan C is just kind of drifting around up in the sky." Kelley still intends to bring Plans A and B to the Planning Commission next month, Welch said.

The Friends of Porter Sesnon are angry that Levy attended the meeting, and said she should have told the rest of the supervisors about the pending discussions.

"We are shocked to see another plan for the Porter Sesnon property surface in a manner that has the appearance of a backroom political deal while we are in the midst of the public review process of Plan A & B," Powell-Murray wrote in her letter.

In fact, this is not the first time it became known that a third plan for the Porter Sesnon property was being considered, in that the "Asilomar for the Arts" proposal was reported in local newspapers more than a year ago.

Another FOPS member, Greg Hudson, appeared before the Board of Supervisors last week to ask they investigate the propriety of those people who participated in last week's meeting.

"Mrs. Levy, however innocently you attended the meeting, when it became clear to you what was going on, why

didn't you leave?" Hudson asked.

Levy did not respond, but she told reporters her participation in the meeting was in no way a commitment to Kelley, and that she was only there for information.

In response to Hudson's presentation, Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr. said this morning he doesn't fault Levy for attending the meeting.

"I think Robley was right on and if she thinks she can bring a solution by attending a meeting... more power to her," Moore said. "I commend her for it, for trying to solve the problem."

Supervisors Chairman Gary Patton said he didn't know much about the meeting, but said, "I would be very concerned obviously if any board member was making deals with developers."

Patton said he did not know if Levy had in fact made any deals, but said he usually tries to avoid meetings with developers because it can lead to criticism.