

Wingspread gets a boost

For the first time in the long dispute over the use of the Porter Sesnon property, an official Santa Cruz County body has recommended action that would allow private development of that prime beachfront acreage in the Midcounty.

The action taken Monday night by the county's Parks and Recreation Commission was only advisory, and it was not technically addressed to any particular development proposal, but if the recommendations were to be followed by the Board of Supervisors, a proposal to construct a 295-unit vacation rental-conference center-performing arts-recreational complex would stand a good chance of approval.

What the commission did at its meeting at Aptos Village Park was to recommend that the General Plan designation on Porter Sesnon be changed from "regional park" to "community park," which would require considerably less acreage to be devoted to parks and recreation purposes.

As part of that recommendation, the commission indicated that the 295-unit Wingspread Beach project proposed by the Palo Alto development firm of Hare, Brewer and Kelley would provide needed recreational facilities for the county, with some modifications.

"We're delighted with the action," said Tim Welch, a spokesman for Conference Associates, a subsidiary of the development firm. Hare, Brewer and Kelley holds a 99-year lease from the University of California on the 66-acre Porter Sesnon property, and Conference Associates is the entity which has applied to the

county to develop the Wingspread project on the property.

Welch said that Conference Associates agreed with most of the conditions for private use of the property that the commission recommended Monday night. Only the condition that 10 acres, instead of the 5.5 promised in the project application, be dedicated for use as soccer and recreation fields was mentioned by Welch as a possible sticking point.

The commission vote that opened the first crack in the door for private development of the property was 3-2, with Commissioners Norm Daley, Dale Skillicorn and Jo Ann Ferguson voting for it, and Commissioners Marsha Shanle and Sue Haynes against. Although advisory body members don't necessarily reflect the sentiments of the supervisors who appoint them, it should be noted that Daley is the appointee of Midcounty Supervisor Robley Levy, Skillicorn the appointee of Pajaro Valley Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr., and Ms. Ferguson the appointee of Soquel-Live Oak Supervisor Dan Forbus. The two negative voters, Ms. Shanle and Ms. Haynes, are the appointees of Santa Cruz-North Coast Supervisor Gary Patton and San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, respectively.

Commissioners Shanle and Haynes wanted to keep the acreage in a regional park designation, which was also the recommendation of the staff. Daley led the opposition to that position, mainly on the grounds that there were no public funds available to develop the land as a regional park. While the state

has appropriated \$4 million to buy Conference Associate's lease, the company has refused to sell and the state has shown no inclination to press the issue with a condemnation suit. And the county has no money to develop the property.

The 295-unit proposal includes a performing arts complex of three theaters — which would be turned over to a foundation, with financial support guaranteed from a share of the rentals of the 295 condominium units — and public recreation areas. Many of the approximately 50 people who attended Monday night's meeting, while carefully refraining from supporting any particular private use of the land, stressed their view that performing arts facilities are critically needed in the county.

Without a General Plan amendment as recommended by the commission there would be no chance of development of the 295-unit complex, with its performing arts and recreational adjuncts. As a fallback position, Conference Associates also has submitted plans for the development of a 200-unit hotel-conference center, which could be accommodated under the existing General Plan designation, but which would not include any of the cultural or recreational facilities.

The next step for the development proposals will be a hearing before the Planning Commission, not yet scheduled. The commission, after public hearings, will submit its recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, which, after more public hearings, will make the final decision — always presuming that it fits within the state coastal regulations.

REFERENCE

[REDACTED]