

Wingspread plan gets first hearing

By NANCY BARR

Nearly six years after the first proposal was advanced, a plan for developing the beach-front Porter Sesnon property near Aptos made it to the public hearing stage last Wednesday.

The county Planning Commission heard testimony on the smaller of two separate development proposals — both known as Wingspread Beach — for the 66-acre parcel which is owned by the University of California, but held on a 99-year lease by the Palo Alto development firm of Hare, Brewer and Kelley.

The commission, however, took no action on the proposal because the deadline for taking testimony arrived before all speakers could be heard. The hearing was continued for two weeks. Chairman Denise Holbert had announced the meeting would not go past 11 p.m., and a 45-minute delay because of a problem with the sound system in the Aptos High School cafeteria left less than three hours for testimony.

Before the commission last night was the Wingspread Plan A, that almost nobody seems to want built. This plan calls for 197 condominium units, a conference center, tennis courts

Few favor smaller of 2 proposals

and a swimming pool.

Opposition to Plan A does not only come from people who don't want to see any development other than possibly a state park on the scenic ocean-front property; it was also not greeted with enthusiasm by the county planning staff. And Ryland Kelley, head of the development firm, is also in favor of pursuing his other proposal for developing the property.

That alternate proposal, known as Plan B, would allow much more intensive development. The plan calls for the construction of 295 units (convertible to as many as 585 units), a performing arts center with 1,700 seats, commercial facilities, tennis courts, a swimming pool, and public soccer and baseball fields.

Plan B has gained the support of a segment of the community, largely because it would offer a much-needed performing arts center. But the smaller Wingspread proposal — Plan A — has drawn very little community support, as evidenced at last week's hearing.

In her report to the commission, county planner Linda Niebanck questioned whether the Plan A was the best possible use of the land.

"Is the county receiving the greatest possible public benefit from this opportunity?" Niebanck asked. "The site may be so valuable to the community as either undeveloped open space or intensely-developed recreation and visitor-serving uses, that the present proposed Plan A appears the least attractive alternative."

Plan A is consistent with current zoning ordinances, Niebanck said, but Plan B would require an amendment to the county's Local Coastal Program.

A second environmental impact report is now being prepared for Plan B, and the plan is expected to go before the Planning Commission by the end of the summer.

The county has indicated its highest priority for the use of the Porter Sesnon property would be as a park. Although the state Department of Parks has considered purchasing the

property, to expand New Brighton Beach State Park, Kelley has refused to sell and the state has expressed no interest in trying to obtain the property through condemnation.

Kelley's architect, Don Crosby, told the commission that Plan A would only put buildings or parking lots on 15 percent of the 72-acre parcel. Most of the wooded areas and the wide-open meadow would be protected, and beach access would be provided to the public, as required in county codes, Crosby said.

To meet the county's parking requirements, the plan also sets aside more than 900 parking spaces, 200 of which would be in an underground garage.

Kelley later said he would be willing to dedicate a part of the parcel to the county for use as a community park if the county would lessen its parking requirements. He argued that there is no need for 900 parking spaces when there are only 197 units designed for two people each.

Kelley's traffic consultant and the county planning staff report both said the traffic improvements that would be required, if the project is built would actually decrease the traffic problems in the area, despite the additional car trips the project would generate.

Kelley said he doesn't see how the county could deny the application for Plan A.

"It is with some astonishment that we read the staff report which pleads with the developer for a larger project than is permitted under the prevailing zoning ordinance,"

Kelley said, later adding that he would likely drop his attempt to get Plan B approved if this "smaller development is rejected."

"How can we even expect you to approve Plan B, which would require zoning changes," he said, "if you're not willing to approve a completely conforming Plan A?"

Speaking out against Wingspread Plan A at last night's hearing were a number of local

residents.

"If more people knew what the (Porter Sesnon) property was like, more people would be fighting for it," said Walt Schlobohm.

The project would lead to the "destruction of wildlife and a beautiful area," said Cherie Bobbe, whose home overlooks the property.

"That land is so precious that future generations will thank us for preserving it," Dwight Dillon said.

Others told the commission the community would be best served if the property was used as a state park, or left open for others to enjoy.

A few minutes before 11 p.m. it appeared the only person who wished to speak was the developer's attorney, who was to offer his rebuttal to the testimony. That will be heard at the continued hearing next week. That hearing also will be held at 7:30 p.m., but in the County Governmental Center in Santa Cruz instead of in the Mid-county.

REFERENCE