

Heated battle expected over Wingspread-measure wording

By KATHARINE BALL
STAFF WRITER

A pitched battle is expected tomorrow at the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors meeting over the wording of the Wingspread ballot measure, which is to go on the June ballot and will ask county voters whether they want the hotel-conference center-performing arts complex to be built.

The measure has achieved supreme significance after the county, in the person of Supervisor Robley Levy, pressured the state Coastal Commission to delay its hearing on the matter last Friday.

A Coastal Commission endorsement of Wingspread would have boosted its chances of success in the general election, Levy said. An adverse ruling would have killed the project outright. That rejection appeared imminent when Levy attempted to yank the project out of commission consideration Friday, accompanied by strident protests from supervisors Gary Patton and Joe Cucchiara, who have all along opposed Wingspread.

Instead of permitting Levy to withdraw the project, coastal commissioners continued the hearing with the stipulation that they would not consider Wingspread until a general vote

had been taken in the county.

The battle over the ballot-measure wording tomorrow will be a mere prelude to the trench warfare expected as a divided county goes into election season debating the merits of Wingspread.

Campaigners on both sides are already hard at work thinking up strategies, ads and bumper stickers that will sway county residents the way they want them to go.

Wingspread opponents plan to pack the supervisors' chambers tomorrow and scream bloody murder over the ballot-measure wording proposed by County Counsel Dwight Herr.

'Kelley's got the money, but we've got the people.'

—Chris Moran, Wingspread opponent

Opponents say that wording paints too becoming a portrait of the development, which, if approved, will occupy the 66-acre Porter Sesnon property on the coast opposite Cabrillo College.

Patton said, "There are a number of ways the measure as worded is promoting the project. It's as if a ballot argument is integrated into the

text."

Patton and other opponents say the ballot measure should not include a statement that Wingspread, when built, will guarantee the county at least \$1 million a year in rent for about 90 years.

But Herr said yesterday that claim is valid. A signed agreement between Wingspread developer Ryland Kelley and the county, now in escrow, says the county will receive \$1 million in fixed rent or a percentage of the gross receipts, whichever is higher. But if the project goes bankrupt, the county would only receive a percentage of the gross

receipts, however small those might be, Herr said.

Opponents charge that the project is not likely to be fiscally sound, given the glut of hotel space in the greater Bay Area.

The county will receive whatever rent there is through a complicated arrangement that makes it the holder of a lease that Kelley obtained from the

University of California, which really owns the property on which Wingspread would be built. Kelley obtained the 99-year lease in 1979, and it will expire in 2078, said Herr.

Fine points aside, the Wingspread issue appears to have county residents divided about 50-50, pro and con, judging from correspondence to the state Coastal Commission, which has final jurisdiction over the project. The proposed development has pitted the usually united artistic and environmental communities against each other, with artists hungering for the performing arts complex and environmentalists appalled that the last large coastal open space in Midcounty might become host to the large project.

Numerous neighbors of the Porter Sesnon property are concerned about the amount of traffic the project might generate, and other opponents question whether the hotel will be the financial boon to the county its developer claims it will be.

Others want to see Santa Cruz able to compete for large conventions and the dollars they bring to an area.

Chris Moran, a Wingspread opponent, sees a tough battle ahead.

"Kelley's got the money, but we've got the people," she said.