

# Latest Wingspread plan under fire at hearing

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SANTA CRUZ — County Administrative Officer George Newell and his proposed lease deal with Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley came under fire Tuesday night as the Board of Supervisors opened hearings on Kelley's development plans for the Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos.

Supervisors Chairman Gary Patton and critics of Kelley's controversial Wingspread development took aim at Newell's recommendation that the county become, in effect, a partner in the development

of the 66-acre parcel adjacent to New Brighton State Beach — after the board put one variation of the Wingspread theme out of its misery.

Acting on a motion by Second District Supervisor Robley Levy, the board voted unanimously to uphold the Planning Commission's rejection of Wingspread "Plan A," which called for construction of a 197-unit hotel-conference center on the Porter-Sesnon site.

Kelley spokesman Tim Welch had previously characterized Plan A as a "fall-back" proposal.

The rejection of Plan A left Kelley with two arrows in his development

quiver: the much-discussed "Plan B," which calls for construction of 295 subdividable "lockout" condominium units, a conference center, athletic fields and a domed, three-hall performing arts complex on the Porter-Sesnon land; and "Plan C," a last-minute proposal from Kelley and Newell.

The Planning Commission last month recommended that the board approve Plan B, with some modifications.

Plan C surfaced Monday in a report from the CAO to the board on the public benefits of Wingspread.

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## Wingspread

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Under that plan, Kelley would consent to a 10-percent reduction in the number of condominium units in his development, and an increase the development's subsidy for local cultural activities and environmental causes, in exchange for county participation in the project.

The developer wants the county to purchase his 99-year lease on the Porter-Sesnon property, and buy a six-acre parcel which he owns adjacent to it. Under the plan outlined by Newell, the county would then lease the land back to Kelley for 50 years, and the Wingspread development would be constructed and operated there as a concession.

Newell said Plan C would net county government nearly \$27 million in concession revenues over 10 years. Another \$2.7 million would go to the county Arts Museum, Cultural Council, Land Trust, and the Santa Cruz County Historic Preservation Society over the same period, he said.

Under Plan C, Kelley would build the \$7.5-million performing arts facility and the athletic fields — price tag: \$1.6 million — contemplated under Plan B; he would also construct a 20-space youth hostel and set aside land for a 36-space recreational vehicle park next to New Brighton State Beach.

In his report to supervisors, Newell called the public benefits of Plan C, which he and his staff negotiated with Kelley over the last month or so, "unprecedented."

The CAO's enthusiasm for the proposal was not shared by board Chairman Patton, who charged that Newell had exceeded his authority as administrative officer.

Said Patton of Newell's report: "It's a rather creative document, Mr. Newell, when we ask you ... to analyze one proposal (Plan B) and you negotiate another without consulting with the board." The angered chairman complained that Newell's negotiations with Kelley had been conducted "unbeknownst to me" and called for board "review" of the CAO's conduct in the matter.

Sierra Club spokesman Hal Levin charged in a statement handed to reporters Tuesday night that Newell's report had set a "new precedent for impropriety in Santa Cruz County government."

Speaking for Friends of Porter-

Sesnon, the group which has been leading the fight against Wingspread, attorney Celia Scott-Von der Muhll meanwhile called Plan C "preposterous."

"Is the county now to be the developer?" she demanded. "Is this Santa Cruz County or is it Orange County?"

"Santa Cruz County in the past has been special and unique," said Scott-Von der Muhll. "We do not bow down to developers."

Warning the board that the proposed lease/lease-back agreement with Kelley would simply substitute "one ripoff for another," the attorney accused the CAO of attempting to "sell our land use to the highest bidder."

She urged supervisors to reject both plans B and C and "put an end to the current charade and manipulation of our planning process before more time and money are spent" on the Wingspread proposal.

With board approval of the remaining Wingspread plans appearing to hinge on the question of the development's presumed public benefits, Friends of Porter-Sesnon sought to convince supervisors Tuesday that the project's promised cultural benefits could not be delivered.

John B. Dykstra, one of several consultants hired by the group to testify at Tuesday's hearing, told the board that the performing arts complex was likely to cost several million dollars more than Kelley's estimate.

And J. Richard Recht, an Oakland-based "urban economist," said Wingspread's built-in subsidies for the arts could add anywhere from \$40,000 to \$60,000 to the cost of the development's condominiums, making the condominium project — the financial engine which is supposed to make Wingspread go — unmarketable.

Kelley spokesman Welch was in a buoyant mood Tuesday evening. Exulted Welch, who touted Wingspread's public benefits and asked the board to ignore the Planning Commission's recommended changes in Plan B: "By golly, after six years, we are so happy to be before you, I can hardly express it."

Welch and Wingspread supporters and critics will have another opportunity to appear before the board when supervisors resume consideration of the development at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 4 at Aptos High School.