

Wingspread proposal grinds to a halt again

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SANTA CRUZ — Wingspread Plan B's stately progress toward a decision by the Board of Supervisors was interrupted Wednesday afternoon when the county Planning Commission and planning staff fell to bickering over how the proposal was to be forwarded to the board.

The controversial development plan, which calls for construction of several hundred condominium units, a conference center, a three-hall performing arts complex and athletics fields on the 72-acre Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos, was approved "in concept" by the Planning Commission on a 3-2 vote last month.

At that time, commissioners directed the staff to return at Wednesday's meeting with a set of findings and conditions to accompany their recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.

Staffers did return with a number of findings for approval, but with no conditions, and with a new procedural wrinkle.

In a report delivered to the commission just 10 minutes prior to the start of Wednesday's hearing, staffers said that development-plan changes proposed by commissioners last month were significant enough to require additional environmental review. Therefore, they said, the commission ought to send the project on to supervisors with a recommendation that the board review the commission's proposed changes, adopt a final design for Plan B and send Plan B back to the county's environmental coordinator for further review — in preparation for its eventual return to the Planning Commission, which would adopt revised findings and conditions before returning it, once again, to the Board of Supervisors.

The idea that the much-debated

proposal might be returned to the Planning Commission again angered two of the commissioners who voted for the project and left the third close to apoplectic.

"What I voted on last meeting was the Planning Commission's final action," thundered Commissioner Ivan Eberly. "All we're supposed to be doing today is going over findings and conditions for (that) final action.

"We're supposed to go out of here with a recommendation," he said. "We don't have to sit here and hack things to death."

Commissioner Dale Skillicorn, who joined with Eberly in recommending Plan B's approval last month, said of the staff's report: "This is not at all what we asked for."

"I feel like I'm being manipulated to put this thing back in limbo," said Commissioner Ree Burnap, who cast the swing vote on the Wingspread proposal in November. "We have asked for findings and conditions and we have got this other thing."

It was mainly Burnap's proposals for design changes — which were accepted by Skillicorn and Eberly in order to move the Wingspread plan along — which led the staff's conclusion that more environmental review would be needed.

Burnap last month conditioned her support for the project on a relocation of the development's main entrance, its performing arts center, one of its lodges, its tennis courts, swimming pool and a public parking lot for beach-goers.

Staffers said Wednesday that a number of the changes — particularly the entrance and performing arts facility relocations — could have environmental impacts beyond those already assessed in a voluminous environmental impact report on the Wingspread project. They said, however, that those impacts could

not be examined until after the changes had been incorporated in the development's design.

Any redesign of the project, staffers later explained, would have to be done by Wingspread developers, who won't make any changes in their plans until the Board of Supervisors actually requires them.

Burnap remained unimpressed by staffers' explanations Wednesday. Moving to continue the matter to Dec. 18, she said she no longer trusted the staff to follow the commission's directions and vowed to return in two weeks with her own set of findings and conditions for approval of the Wingspread proposal.

An attorney for Friends of Porter-Sesnon, a group opposed to the Wingspread project, threw a monkey wrench of her own into the planning machinery Wednesday. Celia Scott-Von der Muhll objected that the commission could not consider a number of Local Coastal Plan changes associated with the development because, she said, the planning staff had failed to give adequate public notice of them.

Richard Allen, an attorney for Wingspread developers Hare, Brewer and Kelley, quickly agreed to postpone consideration of the LCP changes for another two weeks. Allen also agreed with the planning staff that the commission's proposed design changes would require additional environmental review if they are approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Wednesday's delay means that the board will not take its first look at Plan B until January, at the earliest. Supervisors will, however, consider developer Ryland Kelley's smaller Plan A Tuesday. The commission has recommended denial of that proposal, which includes a 197-unit hotel-conference center, but no public concert facilities.