

# Wingspread report sparks controversy

## Coastal Commission staff urges rejection of Aptos development

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SANTA CRUZ — The California Coastal Commission's staff has recommended that the commission reject a series of Local Coastal Program changes which must be approved before Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley can build his controversial Wingspread Beach project in Aptos.

The recommendation was contained in a 69-page report released to the public Friday. The Coastal Commission is scheduled to consider the report Feb. 26 in Marina del Rey.

The report was barely out Friday before it became the subject of heated debate.

Wingspread foe Hal Levin praised the commission staff for "doing the only thing they could do." Kelley spokesman Tim Welch meanwhile attacked the report as a "hatchet job," and Bill Yeates, a former Coastal Commission staffer

who now is a lobbyist for Kelley, said he was "surprised" by the staff's recommendation.

Yeates accused commission staffers of colluding with opponents of the ambitious hotel, conference center and performing-arts complex, which Kelley hopes to build on the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property next to New Brighton Beach State Park. "The staff and the opponents must have worked well together," he said.

The 468-unit development was approved by county supervisors on a 3-2 vote last October. Supervisors also agreed to hold a public "advisory" vote on the project, and to be bound by the outcome of that election, tentatively planned for June. The board has been waiting for the Coastal Commission to act on the proposed LCP changes before setting the election, however.

The Porter-Sesnon property is designated as a

"proposed park and recreation" site under the county's current Local Coastal Program, which was approved by the state commission five years ago. The LCP limits privately developed visitor accommodations at Porter-Sesnon to 130 units.

The changes requested by the county would change the site's land-use designation to "visitor accommodations/community park" and increase the ceiling on the number of visitor units at Porter-Sesnon to 468.

The commission staff said the county's proposed changes were "inconsistent" with policy objectives of the Coastal Act. According to the staff, development of the Wingspread project at Porter-Sesnon would:

- Diminish "coastal recreational opportunities" at the site.

- Run counter to a Coastal Act stricture that "lower cost visitor and recreational facilities shall be protected, encouraged and, where feasible, provided" within the coastal zone.

- Reduce and impede public access to the site and the beach below its bluffs.

The staff report said that opportunities for coastal recreation would be reduced by the Wingspread development because a number of its facilities — including "private clubs ... administrative offices, fitness centers, beauty shops, restaurants and small food outlets and ... retail stores" — involve uses that "have no direct relationship to a coastal setting."

The staff singled out the project's proposed three-hall performing arts complex as a prime example of such a facility, noting that "performing arts facilities are not as a rule considered coastal recreation, nor even truly visitor-serving, since they cater primarily to local patrons."

Wingspread supporters have touted the proposed development's performing arts complex as a permanent home for such local events as the world-acclaimed Cabrillo Music Festival. Kelley, meanwhile, plans to bring "world-class" performing artists to the facility, to draw out-of-county guests to the

Wingspread hotel complex.

The staff said that the proposed changes would discourage development of "lower-cost" recreational facilities at the Porter-Sesnon site, because they would frustrate attempts by the state Parks and Recreation Department to acquire the property.

The Parks Department has stood ready since 1982 to buy the site from Kelley for \$4 million. But Kelley, who paid the University of California \$1.75 million for a 99-year lease on the property in 1978, has refused to sell.

The commission staff said the need for "lower-cost (camping) facilities in the vicinity of Porter-Sesnon remains acute," and said that "in the face of this known demand," the proposed LCP changes "must be denied."

Commission staffers also said that the county's proposed changes would "substantially reduce public access opportunities" at Porter-Sesnon because if the LCP is changed and the property is developed by Kelley, it would not be completely open to the public.

Noting that the entire Porter-Sesnon site has been used by the public for many years, the staff said the commission should stick with the county's existing coastal program, under which, it said, "the entire 66 acres would be available for public

use."

Levin, a vocal opponent of Wingspread, said Friday that he and other Wingspread foes were "very pleased that the staff sees (things) the way we do."

"We hope the commission will see it the same way," he said. "If they don't, we won't roll over."

Kelley spokesman Welch said the staff's recommendation had come as "no surprise" to him. "We have expected the staff to oppose this for a period of years," he said. "We expected this kind of a hatchet job."

Yeates, who worked for eight years as a Coastal Commission lobbyist in Sacramento and who now lobbies for Kelley, said that the LCP changes proposed by the county and the Wingspread development were not in conflict with the Coastal Act. "All the (Wingspread) plan does is dedicate land for public services and increase (its) visitor capacity," he said.

Yeates noted that the county was requiring Kelley to set aside land for a "community park," dedicate other land for open space and provide beach access for the public. "That strikes me as all fairly consistent with the Coastal Act," he said.

Yeates noted that in the past the commission had approved other projects offering far less coastal access than Wingspread.

REFERENCE