

Wingspread measure certified for ballot

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It appears proponents of an anti-Wingspread initiative have collected enough signatures to place the measure before Santa Cruz County Supervisors.

Under law, the supervisors, who may consider the initiative as soon as Tuesday, July 15, can either adopt the initiative or place it on the November ballot for consideration by the voters.

The "fiscal responsibility initiative" would prevent the county from becoming financial partners with Wingspread developer Ryland Kelley. It is aimed at Wingspread Plan C, the plan the supervisors are currently considering. Plan C proposes the county buy Kelley's long-term lease on the Porter Sesnon property in Aptos. In turn, Kelley would lease back the land, develop the Wingspread Beach conference center and run it as a county concessionaire.

A coalition of environmentalists and neighbors has opposed Wingspread since the first development plan was proposed six years ago. The group, now called the Committee for Neighborhood and Coastal Protection, has called Plan C an inappropriate and risky investment of taxpayers' money. The group has fought to develop the 66-acre oceanfront Porter Sesnon property as a state park.

To put an end to the plan, the group launched the Fiscal Responsibility Initiative and collected 11,403 signatures, well over the 7,756 needed to qualify it for passage by the board of supervisors or for the

November ballot. Officials in the county Elections Office used a standard random sampling test to check the signatures. The results show nearly 90 percent of the 570 signatures sampled were valid.

Vickie Powell-Murray, spokesman for the Committee for Neighborhood and Coastal Protection, said two-thirds of the signatures were collected in Aptos-Capitola Supervisor Robley Levy's district. The county Elections Office could not verify this claim.

Levy provided the swing vote needed to approve Wingspread Plan B, then later lent her support to the financing scheme proposed in Plan C.

"It seems clear to me that Supervisor Levy needs to take a hard look at this unofficial poll," Powell-Murray said.

She said the group would continue to block Wingspread through initiatives and other means.

"We have been in this struggle for over six years now and don't plan to give up," she said. "We expect the developer to pour enormous sums of money into the campaign to try to sell the voters his carpet bag of goods."

Levy could not be reached for comment.