

Coveted Sesnon property not in Capitola's sphere

By BOB SMITH

Everyone seemingly got a half a loaf Wednesday morning when the Santa Cruz County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) set the new Capitola sphere of influence in the Porter-Sesnon area.

Commissioners decided on a 3-2 vote, with political foes Marilyn Liddicoat and Robley Levy dissenting to set the city's new sphere boundary just north of the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property, and including all of New Brighton Beach State Park and the Pine Tree Lane and Pot Belly Beach residential areas in the city's sphere.

The city originally had asked for all the land south of the freeway out to Borregas Gulch and including the Porter-Sesnon property, leased by the University of California to Hare, Brewer and Kelley.

Aptos incorporation proponents opposed Capitola's extension as did some residents of the Pine Tree and Pot Belly areas.

The decision left Capitola without the option to annex the Porter-Sesnon property — the principal reason the city petitioned LAFCO for the boundary change.

It left the Aptos cityhood supporters with the prospect of seeing Capitola extend its city boundaries further into the area claimed by Aptos.

And it left residents on Pine Tree Lane, who switched from opposing to supporting the

annexation at the last moment, in a catch 22 situation. They had wanted to annex to Capitola because they felt Capitola would better control the Porter-Sesnon development than the county would. But LAFCO decision leaves Capitola without the possibility of annexing the Porter-Sesnon property across New Brighton Road from Pine Tree Lane, and still opening the possibility of the residential enclave being asked to join Capitola.

The only "winners" in the decision were Hare, Brewer and Kelley, who opposed the Capitola annexation after the city council went on record as favoring state park purchase of the land, and the AMTRON Corp. AMTRON started the entire sphere of influence process by asking Capitola to annex a McGregor Drive site for a new electronics manufacturing plant.

In reaching their decision Wednesday, Mrs. Liddicoat and Mrs. Levy wound up both opposed to the compromise suggested by Santa Cruz City Councilman Joe Ghio and Watsonville Citycouncilman Charles Palmtag, but for different reasons.

Mrs. Liddicoat said she favored only a sphere extension that would encompass the state owned property in or around New Brighton Beach State Park, and possibly the McGregor Drive frontage owned by AMTRON.

Mrs. Levy wanted the sphere extended all the way

out to Borregas Gulch, putting Capitola in potential control of the Porter-Sesnon property.

Commission Chairman Pat Liberty supported the compromise motion.

"I feel strongly that it should not be extended to the Porter-Sesnon property," Mrs. Liddicoat told other commissioners after listening to the presentations from Capitola city officials, Aptos incorporation representative Mrs. Glenn Specht and Hare, Brewer and Kelly representative Skip Morris.

She cited opposition from some Pine Tree Lane and Pot Belly Beach residents as well as the opposition from Hare Brewer and Kelly and the University of California as the reasons for her decision.

"I feel it (Porter-Sesnon) logically belongs to the Aptos side. I only would be willing to go along with the staff recommendation (for the state park property and AMTRON) and I have a problem with the AMTRON portion. But if the rest of the board wants to, I won't object," Mrs. Liddicoat added.

Mrs. Levy, on the other hand, said she looked for an "appropriate natural boundary" and "who can best serve the development that will take place.

"Borregas Gulch," she added, "is the historical boundary in the area.

"It seems clear," Mrs. Levy said, "that no matter what development takes place the

*See also
unincorporated*

effect of the development should be well served by whatever jurisdiction have taken control. At this point, it seems that Capitola has the capacity to provide municipal services."

Underlying much of public discussion was the effect that annexation of Porter-Sesnon by Capitola would have on the ultimate development of that property.

Here, Brewer and Kelley are in the midst of a two-year preliminary lease on the property with the option for a 99 year lease from the University of California Regents.

Operating as Conference Associates, the developers of Pajaro Dunes are publicly proposing to cooperate with a quasi-public citizen's group, the Cultural Action Plan of Santa Cruz County, to build an \$8-10 million conference and cultural center on the property.

Behind that proposal, and never publicly discussed by Hare, Brewer and Kelley, is the accompanying proposal to build a large condominium project — perhaps 300-400 units — adjacent to the cultural center.

And while Santa Cruz County officials are actively participating in the development of the Cultural Action Plan, the Capitola City Council has gone on record as favoring acquisition of the property by the state Parks System.

Capitola Mayor Michael Routh and Mrs. Liddicoat

clashed over the differing goals for the land.

Referring to the Hare, Brewer and Kelley proposal to finance up to 80 percent of the cultural center's construction costs, Routh told the LAFCO commissioners, "they don't mention the 300-400 condominium units. The major impact from these units will fall on the city of Capitola.

"The Cultural Action Plan would cost \$8-10 million to develop," the Mayor added. "Hare, Brewer and Kelley would pay up to 80 percent. You still need \$1.2 million, it may take years to develop — if ever."

After asking Routh if he had ever attended any meetings of the group (he said he had attended one), Mrs. Liddicoat said, somewhat heatedly: "As the Mayor of Capitola, I would have thought you would have spoken to the group before making these statements.

"This is a very dedicated group of people, making a major, major effort and I'm concerned that you spoke disparagingly of the group."

Mrs. Liberty picked up the questioning then, asking Routh if Capitola wanted the land to remain a park forever, or if it would be developed someday.

"We support the state parks system," Routh said, referring to the embryo proposal by the Department of Parks and Recreation to acquire the parcel.

But what if the state parks system couldn't buy it? Mrs. Liberty asked.

"I haven't made up my mind, because I haven't seen any data about it," Routh answered, avoiding a yes or no answer on the private development issue.

A few moments later, Capitola Councilwoman Mrs. Carin Mudgett added another facet to the issue.

"I've been attending the Cultural Action Plan meetings," Mrs. Mudgett told the LAFCO board. "They are a wonderful group and they are working very hard."

But noting that a 2,200-seat auditorium in Santa Cruz has a higher priority than the Porter-Sesnon proposal in the Cultural Action Plan, Mrs. Mudgett added:

"I would not want 300 condominiums developed as an adjunct to a cultural center that can not be built because of a lack of funds."

Conference Associate representative Skip Morris then spoke.

Besides urging exclusion of

the Porter Sesnon land from the Capitola sphere, he added:

"I wouldn't have you for a minute ignore the condominium units. But there is no proposal for this property. We are still working with lines on a piece of paper."

But a letter to the commission from Herbert R. Gordon, Treasurer of the Regents of the University of California, notes that Conference Associates "has leased the land until May 1, 1981, with an option to extend for an additional 97 years.

"Conference Associates proposes to construct a carefully controlled development consisting of a performing arts center and condominium hotel on the site," Gordon said.

Routh and city Planning Director Richard Steele both argued that the commission should not preclude the possibility of residents annexing to Capitola by denying the sphere of influence request.

Steele also reminded the commission that a sphere of influence for Capitola in the area would not necessarily conflict with efforts to incorporate the same area as part of the city of Aptos.

Routh also contended that Pine Tree Lane residents could all vote against the Aptos incorporation and find themselves in the city, while they had total control over any attempt to annex them to Capitola.

That drew a response from Mrs. Specht. "It's not true that the people of Pine Tree Lane will not have any input," she said. "Certainly, if they are 100 percent against it, we would expect this board to move the boundaries."