

Wingspread hearing set despite protests

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SANTA CRUZ — County supervisors have set Aug. 25 as the date for their next, and perhaps final, hearing on Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley's controversial Wingspread Beach project in Aptos.

The unanimous board vote to set the hearing came over the protest of

the development's opponents. They said the project should be referred back to the Planning Commission because its design had been changed since supervisors approved it "in concept" in March 1986. And they repeated earlier warnings that they will put a referendum on the ballot to block the development if the board finally approves it.

Kelley wants to build a con-

dominium-conference center-performing arts complex on the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property and an adjacent six-acre parcel next to New Brighton Beach. Kelley changed the project's design in response to a series of conditions imposed on the development at the insistence of Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy.

Among the changes were a 20-percent reduction in the number of

the project's hotel-style condominium units — from 590 to 468 — increased open space, and redesign of the three-hall theater complex. Kelley also expanded the conference center's restaurant space.

Project opponents, who say Kelley's development poses a threat to the coastline, claim the expansion in restaurant space will result in more traffic through nearby neighborhoods.

Noting that the development had been "substantially redesigned," Mitchell Page, an attorney for Friends of Porter-Sesnon, which has been leading the Wingspread opposition, said Tuesday that the "Planning Commission is the place to study and evaluate those changes."

Otherwise, he said, supervisors should set a ballot referendum on the proposal for this fall.

"If this is going to be on a fast track, I suggest you put it on the ballot for a referendum (in November)," Page said. "It's going to end up on the ballot anyway; you could put it on faster."

Page warned that if supervisors do not put the matter to a vote this fall, "it could end up on the ballot a year later" — when some board members may be facing runoff elections.

The board voted to set the hearing after rejecting a motion by Third District Supervisor Gary Patton to send the project back to the Planning Commission, as recommended by Page.

Final board approval of the Wingspread project will hinge on the success of negotiations currently under way between Kelley's representatives and the county. Kelley has offered to give the county title to the Wingspread property and to guarantee delivery of a variety of other "public benefits" in exchange for the board's approval of the project. The talks are aimed at developing an ironclad agreement which will guarantee delivery of those benefits, which include: substantial revenues for the county, construction of the performing arts center and continuing subsidies for its operation, construction of three athletics fields on the Wingspread site and financing for a fourth field at another mid-county location, improved access to the beach, and traffic and road improvements.

County Administrative Officer George Newill said Tuesday that the final agreement will most likely take the form of a gift-lease-back arrangement.

REFERENDUM

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