

Porter-Sesnon plan draws fire

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley on Monday submitted as promised a development application for a 197-room lodge and conference facility on the Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos.

The development would be a scaled-down version of an earlier proposal, calling for more units as well as a performing arts center and athletic fields.

Porter-Sesnon development foes were quick to oppose the latest project and have vowed to fight it as tenaciously as they had battled the earlier one.

The new proposal is now called "Meadowpark" — as opposed to Wingspread Beach, which was overwhelmingly rejected by county voters in a ballot initiative in 1988. Meadowpark represents a 58 percent reduction from Wingspread's 468-room lodge.

Meadowpark project manager Tim Welch said Monday, "We are not going into this with a chip on our shoulder, saying 'approve it or we'll sue.' We hope the project is good enough to stand on its own merit."

Both Aptos Supervisor Robley Levy and Santa Cruz Supervisor Gary Patton said Monday that the county's top priority remains that the state purchase the 72.7 acres of coastal bluff land and meadow next to New Brighton State Beach as a state park.

Patton commented, "Obviously, Mr. Kelley knows this is going to be an unpopular proposal."

Besides 271 fewer rooms on the oceanfront acreage, Meadowpark is without Wingspread's three-hall performing arts center and athletic fields.

Welch pointed to the reduced density of the new project, saying it translates into less anticipated traffic. He said 2,145 average daily trips are expected from the project, which is around a third the number expected from Wingspread.

Kelley said Monday that Meadowpark conforms not only to the adopted Santa Cruz County Local Coastal Plan, but also the county's General Plan. He praised the provision of "open space and recreation to the public" in the proposal.

Welch noted that only 5.6 percent of the net developable acreage is being developed, with nearly 86 percent of the 72.7 acres remaining in public open space, including a 3.8-acre public beach to be located between Pot Belly Beach and Las Olas Drive. Some 91 parking spaces accessible to the beach are also provided, as well as a handicapped-accessible beach access trail.

Vickie Powell-Murray of the Friends of Porter-Sesnon said Monday there are no "public benefits" to the new proposal. "We don't need more high-priced condos in Aptos," she said. "If Mr. Kelley really cares so much for our community, then let him move north to downtown Santa Cruz, which is in great need of redevelopment after the earthquake."

Pat Manning, chairwoman of the New Brighton Beach Action Coalition — which is working for state park purchase — said Monday the coalition will unveil an alternate plan for the property in a couple weeks, involving public purchase.

Both Kelley and Welch pointed to what may well be the first anticipated legal dispute — namely, should Kelley be required to conduct another costly, time-consuming environmental study?

They maintained that Meadowpark "fits well inside the parameters of the environmental impact report prepared for the much larger Wingspread project."

Welch conceded that they have already discussed "legal recourse" should it become necessary in the future.

Patton acknowledged, "It would be premature to say we're going to take them to court. It is not premature to say that the people of Santa Cruz County have overwhelmingly spoken for open use."

Levy added, "I think the public in the county wants to see this land acquired as a state park. Despite this submission, I would hope that Mr. Kelley is also working toward that."

Welch responded, "I feel this is a good stand-alone project that meets the visitor-serving use and is one that will generate transit-occupancy tax. I think there will be support from those who believe visitor-serving revenue is important, and those people who feel this is a less intensive use of the land."

The controversial Wingspread Beach project was approved by the Board of Supervisors, but was overwhelmingly rejected by county voters in a binding referendum in June 1988. Negotiations then began between Kelley and the state in hopes of the state buying the property for a state park. However, those negotiations foundered after the two sides could not agree on the value of the land.

Kelley noted earlier that he had originally budgeted about \$15 million for public improvements, such as the performing arts center and athletic fields. This amount, he said, "almost exactly equals the value of the 271 rooms, which have been dropped from the project as a result of the election defeat."

"Unfortunately, therefore, we do not have the means to provide the public benefits of the prior proposed project," Kelley said.

REFERENCE

APR 1 1990
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an for the Porter-Sesnon property calls for development near the beach and on the left side of the property, as seen from this p