

Wingspread foes drop one ballot measure

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SANTA CRUZ — Backers of a ballot initiative aimed at giving a minority of the Board of Supervisors veto power over certain county land-use decisions have temporarily abandoned that measure in favor of another one. The new initiative, which supporters hope to qualify for the November ballot, is aimed at blocking county financial participation in the controversial Wingspread Beach project.

The new measure would bar the county from using local or state funds to participate "financially ... in any form whatsoever" in the condominium/conference center-performing arts facility proposed by Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley

for the 66-acre Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos.

Wingspread opponents announced their intention in a legal notice Friday to circulate a petition to put the initiative on the ballot. Publication of the notice came 10 days after supervisors voted 3-2 to authorize County Administrative Officer George Newell to negotiate with Kelley for purchase of Kelley's 99-year Porter-Sesnon lease. The CAO was also authorized by supervisors to seek state financial participation in the Wingspread project.

Newell wants the county to purchase the lease and then lease the site back to Kelley, who would build and operate the Wingspread project there under a concession agreement with the county. The CAO believes

that a purchase/lease-back arrangement will better secure the project's anticipated public benefits against the threat of annexations and possible lawsuits, and net the county more revenue.

Wingspread opponents, who contend that the project is not financially sound, charge that the proposed deal is really aimed at making an otherwise unworkable development succeed.

Vickie Powell-Murray, spokeswoman for Friends of Porter-Sesnon, a group which opposes Wingspread, Friday called the anti-purchase/lease-back initiative "much more important and much more critical" than the ballot measure which she and other Wingspread foes announced 18 days

ago.

While not aimed directly at Wingspread, that measure would have stymied the project by requiring a four-fifths vote of the Board of Supervisors for certain General Plan and Local Coastal Program changes needed before the development could proceed.

The Wingspread development was conceptually approved by supervisors on a 3-2 vote in March. Supervisors Chairman Gary Patton and Fifth District Supervisor Joe Cucchiara voted against the project then and are expected to vote against the needed General Plan and LCP amendments in the future. The four-fifths vote initiative was seen by many observers as an attempt to

give Patton and Cucchiara veto power over the Wingspread development.

Patton, who faces an election challenge this spring from Santa Cruz City Councilman Arnold Levine, had been walking a political tightrope on the measure in recent weeks. The supervisors chairman declined to endorse the initiative,

which was backed by some of his key supporters. But he was reluctant to disavow it, saying he "wasn't certain whether (it) wouldn't be a good idea."

Powell-Murray said Friday that Wingspread opponents' newest initiative was a direct response to supervisors' approval of Newell's purchase/lease-back plan.

She said Wingspread foes decided

to drop the earlier measure for the time being because "it would be very difficult to have two initiatives going at one time."

Powell-Murray said, however, that she and others would continue to circulate petitions to put the four-fifths vote measure on the ballot at a later date.

Initiative supporters must collect valid signatures from 7,800 voters by the third week of June to qualify their latest measure for the November ballot.

Under state election law, proponents of the measure cannot begin collecting signatures for another three weeks. But Powell-Murray said she was confident that enough signatures would be collected by the late-June deadline.

REFERENCE

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL
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