

# Some hurdles remain, but project takes a giant step

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Santa Cruz County supervisors voted last night to approve — with many conditions — a plan to develop the Wingspread Beach complex on the Porter Sesnon property in Aptos.

As everyone knew it would be, the vote was 3-2. What nearly nobody knew was whether the 3-2 margin be would for or against the hotly controversial plan to erect a combination of vacation condominium rentals, a conference center, a performing arts complex and recreational playing fields on the 66-acre parcel adjacent to New Brighton State Beach.

The swing vote, as everyone also knew, was possessed by Robley Levy, the supervisor who represents the district in which the acreage is located and the only one of the five board members who had steadfastly refused to commit herself one way or the other on the project.

Last night — with a crowd of about 500 noisy partisans of both sides watching, and kibitzing, in the Aptos High School auditorium — Levy committed herself in favor of the project. But it was a tentative commitment and one which, she made clear, would become final only if the developer, the Palo Alto firm of Hare, Brewer and Kelley, met the conditions which were contained in the motion by Levy that was approved as the final action of the evening at about 11 p.m.

Spokesmen for developer Ryland Kelley indicated immediately after the meeting that they were hopeful the conditions would not be too onerous for the project to proceed. This morning, Kelley himself sounded optimistic, even though he said "there are cost factors involved" in the conditions adopted that must be analyzed. But Kelley was anything but glum about the prospects.

"We're elated," he said.

Even so, there are formidable hurdles yet to be cleared,



Robley Levy explains a point

including approval of the necessary amendments in the Local Coastal Plan by the state Coastal Commission and vows by the opponents that they will continue the fight on the administrative and legal fronts.

As a sidelight, angry opponents made noises about launching a recall movement against Supervisor Levy.

As previous hearings had, last night's meeting brought out enthusiastic partisans and passionate opponents of the proposal being considered — which has been labeled Plan B to distinguish it from other proposals that had been drawn up and discarded through the years.

Throughout the evening, the pro-Wingspread groups waved orange 'Yes!' cards, while opponents — who were more vocal and seemed to be more numerous — waved green streamers.

But all the enthusiasm, as well as the two hours of testimony that came on top of hours of the same kind of testimony at previous hearings, was more

for show than substance. The fact is that all minds on the board were already made up. Levy, for example, had already prepared the speech that was to be the most significant event of the evening.

Early in her prepared remarks the Wingspread opponents realized they had lost Levy's key vote on the project. When Levy made the statement that as a state park — which the opponents of Wingspread support — the property would most likely be developed with campsites for recreational vehicles.

"In other words, the state priority would provide coastal access on Porter Sesnon for the Winnebago owners of America," Levy said.

At this, Wingspread opponents began booing, hissing, looking at each other with dismay, and shaking their heads.

Levy responded, "I would appreciate your willingness to listen. I've been listening for five, six years."

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE  
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN  
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Levy tried to focus the audience on the key issue surrounding the development of the Porter Sesnon property.

"The polarized black-and-white rhetorical presentation of this issue presents a battle between development and open space," Levy said. "That is not the question at issue with respect to the Porter Sesnon property. The Porter Sesnon property is not zoned for open space, it is zoned for development — for park and recreational use. The question before the board is whether this use, or the proposed project is the better use."

"Public comment has been intense, heartfelt, strongminded and strongly stated," Levy said. "Divisions in the community have gone deep. Some have argued that I must vote pro — or con — because my political supporters are on this side of the fence or that. Unfortunately, that easy path to a decision is not available to me. Some of those who support me are passionately in favor, others are passionately opposed. Therefore, I believe that the only course available to me is to try to make a decision on the merits."

Levy argued that a modified Plan B would be environmentally sound, could fully mitigate any traffic impacts, and would provide public access to the coast and a balance of public benefits.

"I think it is important to note that the Coastal Act calls both for protection of coastal resources and for appropriate development of the coast," Levy said.

"On balance, I believe that although state park development of the site may better serve the statewide interest, the balance of public benefits for Santa Cruz County residents is better served by the proposed project." Levy noted the state had not yet developed all available campsites at Manresa Beach or Wilder Ranch.

She also referred to the numbers of cards, letters and calls she's received from all over the county on the issue. Of the 2,944 total, 1,965 were in favor and 979 opposed to Wingspread.

"Despite this intensity of public expression of opinion, I believe that I must make my decision on the merits of the case, not on the mathematics of the mailbox," Levy said.

Levy was joined by Supervisors E. Wayne Moore Jr. and Dan Forbus, who had long been Wingspread backers, in giving tentative approval to the modified project. Supervisors Gary Patton and Joe Cucchiara, who had never left any doubts about their opposition to the development, went down fighting.

Cucchiara was particularly caustic in his attack on Levy's motion and on the Wingspread concept. He urged the supervisors to strip Wingspread of "its bells and whistles" and reminded them the project exceeded current density, height and traffic regulations.

Cucchiara said, "I'm unwilling to sell the soul of our fragile existing neighborhoods from some perceived free lunch for those far removed."

At this remark, the Wingspread opponents jumped to their feet, clapping and cheering.

Cucchiara called Kelley "a developer who ruthlessly, without shame preys upon the dreams and desires of well-meaning, community-spirited individuals. It is much like tempting a condemned man with a gourmet meal just as he is entering the execution chambers."

"Is this county's land-use

authority for sale to the highest bidder? If so, the county would be run by auctioneers, not elected officials," he said.

Live Oak-Soquel Supervisor Dan Forbus gruffly rebutted Cucchiara's remarks. He accused Cucchiara of failing to listen to Levy's motion, which he said addressed every one of Cucchiara's concerns.

Forbus also accused Cucchiara of selling Live Oak piece by piece to developers of high-density affordable-housing projects.

"Joe is an expert in auctioning things off," Forbus said.

Moore followed Forbus. He said he supported Wingspread because the project was in the best interest of his Pajaro Valley constituents. But he noted that if he were representing the neighbors of Porter Sesnon, he might be inclined to vote against Wingspread.

Many of the poor and homeless in the Pajaro Valley depend on public money that Wingspread could provide, Moore said.

He told the audience, "I think in the long run you're going to find this thing isn't going to be as bad as you think its going to be."

Supervisor Patton, who represents most of the city of Santa Cruz, also won a standing ovation for his remarks.

"The polarization that exists about this project reflects two different visions about what this community is and ought to be," Patton said.

Patton called the board's decision on Wingspread a fundamental fork in the road to the county's future. He said it was "a new direction for the county, a direction I cannot support."

The benefits of Wingspread came at a cost, Patton said.

"The burden is on that neighborhood, the destruction of that neighborhood that existed."

Levy called for a long list of modifications in the developer's plan. They included a 20 percent reduction in the

number of rooms allowed, which would reduce the number of potential rentals from 585 to 467.

She also called for ramps leading directly to the freeway, which she estimated would cost \$1.5 million.

Other conditions included:

—Redesigning the performing arts center.

—Financing a pedestrian link to Cabrillo College.

—Devising a way to ensure the county receives the benefits of Wingspread if the property is incorporated or annexed.

—Requesting the developer to construct lighting at the Aptos High School playing fields,

instead of the Wingspread playing fields.

After the vote, Celia Scott-Von Der Muhll, attorney for Friends of Porter Sesnon, a group organized to oppose Wingspread, said, "I think it was a terrible decision."

But she said the issue was far from decided. "We have a long row to hoe," Scott-Von Der Muhll said. "I don't think its future is certain by any means."

Friends of Porter Sesnon, she said, would continue to oppose the project.

Vickie Powell-Murray, president of Friends of Porter Sesnon, said, "I think Levy took her mask off. I think she's a developers' candidate. I think she sold out. People need to understand she has set precedents in this county to rubber-stamp development."

Powell-Murray said it was possible Levy's constituents would move to recall her from office.

Tim Welch, Kelley's chief spokesman on the project, said, "I feel like I'm a teenager again. What I heard sounded workable."

Levy said she spent all last weekend making up her mind on the project.

"It wasn't easy. Really, I was agonizing all of the weekend," she said. "I sat down to write the speech to see if I could convince myself. I realized by about five o'clock today (Tuesday) I had made my decision."