

Wingspread Limpes to Ballot

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Santa Cruz County voters will have a chance to vote on the controversial Wingspread development project in Aptos. But it remains to be seen if their decision will be the final word or just another chapter in the continuing saga of this proposed beach condominium and conference center.

At heated meetings of both the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and the state coastal commission over the past week, officials wrestled with the Wingspread initiative now scheduled for the county's June ballot. If voters reject the referendum, the Wingspread project will be finished; if it is approved, Wingspread still must pass muster at the coastal commission's first meeting after the election. In a move that irked opponents of the project, the supervisors left themselves the option to revise the terms of the referendum if it is approved.

The coastal commission ruling on

the project was to have come last Friday, but after reportedly raucous testimony at their Marina del Rey hearing, the commissioners agreed to delay the decision pending the outcome of the referendum. A pro vote by the commission would have still left the question up to Santa Cruz voters; a con vote would have effectively derailed Wingspread.

County supervisors, meanwhile, approved this Tuesday the referendum package for the June ballot. The decision was protested by Wingspread opponents and Supervisors Gary Patton and Joe Cucchiara. The final wording of the referendum represented a revised version of language that Patton and Cucchiara had rejected the week before. The two dissenting supervisors were just as vociferously opposed to this week's wording.

County Counsel Dwight Herr and Supervisor Robley Levy defended the referendum, which, in both its revised

and original form, cites county revenues to be gained from the project, the inclusion of a performing arts center, public and private recreational facilities, highway improvements and guaranteed public access to the beach.

Both dissenting supervisors, however, objected to the referendum language, which Patton described in such stinging terms as "a real estate promotional brochure." Cucchiara, meanwhile, charged that the initiative is "blatantly a false statement" since it does not make it clear that the supervisors and coastal commissioners could later amend it, and because it "intentionally misrepresents" the fact that the developer, and not the county, is accountable for the project. Wingspread opponent and lawyer for the environmentalist Friends of Porter Sesnon, Mitchell Page, also charged that the referendum may be inherently illegal because it is essentially non-binding and can be amend-

ed by the board even after the voters approve it.

Robley Levy remained in center stage throughout the week's events. As the swing vote on the board's decision to maintain the language in the referendum, and as the county delegate to the Marina del Rey meeting, she drew considerable attention. According to various accounts, the coastal commission meeting ended after a curious chain of circumstances and with Levy's final request that the issue be continued to the next meeting of the commission.

Apparently, four commissioners walked out of the meeting after lengthy testimony and just as the majority of commissioners were poised to turn down the project. At that point—and to the evident surprise of the commissioners—Levy requested a continuance since so many of the commissioners were absent, and then threatened to withdraw the project. Supervisors Patton

and Cucchiara then charged that the board of supervisors had not approved the withdrawal of the application and that Levy's only role as designate was to speak in favor of the project. Patton and Cucchiara went to the meeting independently to speak in opposition to Wingspread.

Various accounts also describe Levy as appearing closely allied to Wingspread developer Ryland Kelley and his assistants. According to the San Jose *Mercury News* Kelley nudged Levy and told her to appeal for the continuance, although Levy later said she hadn't noticed it. According to Page, who went to the meeting to testify against the project, Levy conferred with Kelley's assistants at length and, "to the objective observer, seemed like an agent of employee of the developer."

—Elizabeth Kadetsky