

Wingspread opponents vow to kill project

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As the Santa Cruz County supervisors set the stage for final approval for the proposed Wingspread Beach Conference Center, opponents vowed to kill the development plan through a voter referendum.

The Board of Supervisors unanimously agreed this morning to give the controversial project final consideration Aug. 25.

In so doing, the supervisors rejected the request of Santa Cruz attorney Mitchell Page, a Wingspread opponent, who asked the supervisors to refer the plan to the county Planning Commission.

Page reminded the supervisors that they had promised to send the complex proposal back to the Planning Commission when they gave the project conceptual approval in March of 1985.

Page also urged the supervisors to put the Wingspread issue before the voters, recommending they place it on the Nov. 3 ballot to resolve the issue more quickly.

If the supervisors didn't do that, he said, Wingspread opponents known as "Friends of Porter Sesnon" would launch a referendum drive to repeal the supervisor's approval of the project.

County Recorder Richard Bedal said the supervisors would have until next Tuesday to place the issue on the November ballot.

The exchange this morning provides the latest chapter in the saga of the controversial development proposal.

For the past seven years, Palo Alto developer Ryland Kelley has tried to win approval of his plans to build a conference center, hotel and three-hall performing arts center on the 66-acre Porter Sesnon property in Aptos.

Kelley has been opposed every step of the way by Friends of Porter Sesnon. The group of neighbors and environmentalists has argued that the project will encroach upon the semi-rural neighborhood and despoil that last large open coastal land in the Midcounty area.

Santa Cruz-area Supervisor Gary Patton, an outspoken opponent of the proposal, took up Page's request to refer the

matter to the Planning Commission.

He introduced a motion, explaining that returning the project to the commission would "make good on a promise the majority of the board made" when tentative approval was given to Wingspread more than a year ago.

The motion was supported by Scotts Valley/San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor Joe Cucchiara, also strongly opposed to the development. It failed 3-2.

Though the board voted down Patton's request to return the proposal to the Planning Commission, it did adopt his suggestion that all findings and agreements necessary to approving Wingspread be available to the public by Aug. 18, a week before the supervisors are expected to approve the project.

Key to the Wingspread proposal is a complicated gift and lease-back agreement in which Kelley would hand over his longterm lease on the Porter Sesnon property. In turn the county would allow Kelley to build his project and run it as a concession.

Patton also succeeded in persuading the board to take a more active role in ensuring public access to other facilities Kelley has promised to provide through Wingspread.

Specifically, Patton was referring to the local private, non-profit groups, which according to Kelley's plan are to manage the playing fields and performing-arts facilities.

Patton suggested the supervisors consider appointing members to the non-profit groups, or find some other way to make the group accountable.

The board adopted Patton's suggestion and asked county staff members to propose ways the board could have more control over public use of the facilities.

Patton also urged the supervisors to take more time to consider the legal issues raised by Page. He said it would be much more efficient to settle the issues before the supervisors approved the project rather than invite a suit from Friends of Porter Sesnon.

Live Oak/Soquel Supervisor Dan Forbus said it would be impossible to resolve all the legal issues raised by Friends of Porter Sesnon, and chastised the group for being sore losers.

REFERENCE