

New plan for Wingspread

By BUD O'BRIEN

A new scheme for developing the Porter-Sesnon property in Aptos into an Asilomar of the arts has been advanced by the holders of a 99-year lease on the prize piece of beachfront property near New Brighton State Beach.

Although nobody from the development firm of Conference Associates would comment, it was learned that representatives of the firm had been in contact with state officials to see if they would be receptive to the Asilomar proposal.

Under the proposal, which is in no more than the embryonic stage, Hare, Brewer and Kelley (the parent company of Conference Associates) would sell its lease to the state, then would

An Asilomar of the arts?

act as concessionaire in operating the Asilomar-type complex that would be built on a portion of the 66-acre piece of property.

Exactly what that complex would consist of is not clear from sketchy information that was available Monday. State Sen. Henry Mello, who was approached by a representative of the developers to determine his reaction to the proposal, said he understood the complex would include conference and seminar facilities, as at Asilomar, as well as community performing arts facilities and some condominiums for use by participants in the seminar sessions.

Right now, Conference Associates has made applications to build one of two alternative projects on the property. The one it prefers to develop — dubbed Wingspread Beach — calls for the construction of a performing arts complex, some 295 vacation rental units, and some recreational playing fields. The alternate project calls only for the construction of a complex of 198 rental units, with no performing arts or recreational facilities included.

But those proposals, particularly the larger one, have run into some of the same procedural (and political) roadblocks that have plagued the developers since they first

advanced plans to develop the property more than five years ago. Powerful opposition to any private development of the property surfaced as soon as Hare, Brewer and Kelley negotiated its 99-year lease with the University of California — owners of the property — in 1978.

The property and its use quickly became a political issue, with one faction clamoring for state ownership of the land and its use as a park, and another supporting the developer's proposal to present the county with badly-needed performing arts and recreation facilities as a sort of reward for allowing the development of the big vacation rental project.

At the instigation of Senator

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 1

Mello, the state was authorized to pay \$4 million for the lease on the land, but Ryland Kelley, head of the development firm, said he wasn't interested.

But the continuing opposition and procedural roadblocks have apparently led Kelley to try a new strategy.

Kelley himself, who just returned from a long trip out of the country, refused to discuss the matter this morning, and no other spokesman for the company could be reached. But Senator Mello said representatives of Kelley had informed him that Kelley was becoming convinced that the Wingspread Beach proposal had become so politicized and misunderstood that a new approach was needed.

Basically, that new approach would be to return the lease as well as the underlying ownership to the state. Kelley would then bid as a concessionaire to operate the unspecified facilities that would be built.

Just how the facilities would be financed, or who would build them, was not clear. In any case, Mello noted, there have been no more than informal talks on the matter between Kelley's representatives and the state.

Mello said he had indicated

to the Kelley people that he found their latest proposal interesting.

Mello reiterated his longstanding position that the Porter-Sesnon property ought to be owned by the state. The Watsonville Democrat said he wouldn't oppose some sort of Asilomar-like use of portions of the property so long as the beaches are public and public access is guaranteed.

In any case, it was made clear that the county land use policies must be adhered to, even if the state were to take over Kelley's lease.

Dave Tunno, who is seeking to unseat Robley Levy as supervisor for the Second District, said in a press release this morning that the developer's latest move could cost the

county the chance to receive hundreds of thousands of dollars in taxes — though he did not specify how it would do that.

Tunno said that game-playing by the developer, the planning department and the Board of Supervisors in the four years since the Wingspread Beach project was first proposed is a prime example of the lack of leadership displayed by Levy, who has represented the district in which Porter-Sesnon is located since 1981.

Levy's response to the latest move by Kelley's group was not much different than her general response to earlier proposals had been. She said she wanted to see a specific proposal before the Board of Supervisors before she would make any commitment.