

Wingspread opponents launch a second initiative

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Opponents of the proposed Wingspread Beach conference center have launched a voter initiative to prevent Santa Cruz County from financing the development.

The initiative, the second the Committee for Neighborhood and Coastal Protection has launched this month, comes in response to a Board of Supervisors' vote on April 15. Supervisors Robley Levy, Dan Forbus and E. Wayne Moore have authorized County Administrative Officer George Newell to begin negotiating a deal with developer Ryland Kelley. Newell was told to begin negotiating to buy Kelley's 99-year lease on the Porter Sesnon property in Aptos, then lease the land back to the developer, who would build Wingspread and run it as a concession.

The supervisors had rejected the lease-back plan in a 3-2 vote in March. But Moore, reversing his stance on government participation in private ventures, provided the swing vote needed to adopt the plan in April.

Newell proposed the lease-back plan for a second time, explaining it would be the best way to ensure the county continues to benefit from Wingspread. County ownership of the property would protect it from incorporation or annexation.

Opponents, however, claim that the county's participation is an attempt to secure state grants and low-interest loans for the developer. Some have also said it would be an inap-

propriate to invest taxpayers' money in a private venture.

In an attempt to qualify the new initiative for the November ballot, the group will put its first initiative on the back burner. On April 9, the group launched an initiative requiring a four-fifths vote by county supervisors to raise density limits from those given in the county General Plan and Local Coastal Plan.

That initiative, if passed, would block Wingspread, and also help protect the county's land-use plans from the increasing pressures of developers, the group said.

However, it will take a back seat to the newer "Fiscal Responsibility Initiative," which addresses a much more urgent matter, said Vickie Powell-Murray, a member of the Committee for Neighborhood and Coastal Protection.

The original initiative can qualify for a later ballot, Powell-Murray said.

"We just feel the board's actions (on April 15) were just outrageous and unbelievable," she said. "We feel the most important thing to do is to stop Plan C."

The group must collect 7,800 signatures supporting the measure by June 22 to qualify it for the June ballot.

The initiative would prohibit the county from "owning, operating, leasing, maintaining or financially participating in any form whatsoever through the use of public funds, state or local, in a condominium/hotel/convention center/performing arts facility on the Porter

Sesnon property..."

The petition continues that the county's investment of taxpayers' money in the project "creates unwarranted and unprecedented risks and liabilities for the taxpayers and residents of Santa Cruz County."

The petition also states that the county should not become financial partners in a high-density project that would ruin the nearby peaceful neighborhoods.

Aptos Capitola Supervisor Robley Levy said of the latest initiative, "I suppose it's not a surprise that the people who opposed Wingspread are continuing to oppose it. They do seem to be in some disarray. You have to wonder if their second is their last, or if they will introduce another next week, or another next month."

Santa Cruz Supervisor Gary Patton, who has opposed Wingspread from the start, said he would be extremely supportive of an initiative that opposed the county's financial participation in the "speculative" project. Participation would not be a good precedent, or a good investment, Patton said. He said the proposed arrangement would be "shameful in terms of public financing."