

Vote deadlock binds Coastal Commission

Choosing a new leader could take place today

By LAURA WIDES

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SAN FRANCISCO — The California Coastal Commission deadlocked Wednesday on a vote to elect a new leader, stalling a decision that some fear could tilt the powerful panel away from coastal protection.

After Chairwoman Sara Wan, a favorite of environmentalists, pulled her name from consideration, the 12 commission members split their votes evenly between colleagues Dave Potter and Mike Reilly.

That means Wan will remain chairwoman until another vote is taken. An attempt to cast another round of ballots was scuttled Wednesday afternoon, but commissioners may attempt to vote again today.

"For another month, coastal protection will continue to be subverted by politics," said Mark Massara, director of the Sierra Club's coastal protection program.

Wan's decision left Potter, a contractor and Monterey County supervisor, and longtime Commissioner Mike Reilly, a Sonoma County supervisor, bidding for the influential post.

Potter, the current vice chairman, was the leading candidate to replace Wan. Environmentalists say he has received contributions and loans from developers in the

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Pebble Beach Co., which needs Coastal Commission approval for a golf resort on the Monterey Peninsula.

Potter has called his work for Pebble Beach "inconsequential" and said he is not swayed by developers who come before the commission.

Massara said the panel needs strong leadership as it faces cuts prompted by the state's massive budget deficit. The commission's \$11 million annual budget was cut by \$1 million this year. Like other state agencies, it faces a hiring freeze.

Environmentalists say the panel's nine-member enforcement staff is already woefully small. The staff reviews whether developers are following the state's coastal protection laws and ensures public access to the coast.

Some coastal commission observers said the vote highlighted the need to reform the commission.

"Over the years, the commission has lost its focus," said Norbert Dall, a Sacramento-based coastal consultant. He said the coastal commission has trivialized coastal protection by focusing on minutiae, such as driveway length, instead of considering the big picture.

A number of key issues could come before the commission in 2003, including the Pebble Beach proposal, backed by actor Clint Eastwood, a massive housing and retail development on wetlands in Los Angeles, and a major mixed-use project along Half Moon Bay.

The election of a leader is the latest tempest for the commission that oversees some of the nation's most prized real estate. It rules on proposals ranging from seaside golf resorts to celebrities' requests to expand their villas. It also has say over near-shore oil drilling off the California coast.

Wan said she withdrew because the election has divided the commission.

"To remove the political and personal issues, I will not allow my name to be nominated for chair," she said before calling for other nominations.

Commissioner William Burke said Potter is committed to protecting coastal resources and would be an effective leader.

"It's a matter of process," Burke said. "Potter has been



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California Coastal Commissioners Mike Reilly, left, and David Potter applaud Chairwoman Sara Wan, seated, during a meeting Wednesday in San Francisco. The commission was deadlocked Wednesday in voting for a replacement for Wan, and may meet again today to cast another vote for the chairmanship.

vice chair, now he should be the chair."

Commissioner Cynthia McClain-Hill called the leadership debate overblown.

"It's always very difficult balancing coastal protection and the rights of individual property owners," McClain-Hill said.

On the Net:

California Coastal Commission:
<http://www.coastal.ca.gov/web/>