

Wingspread EIR survey completed

By BUD O'BRIEN

The long-awaited environmental impact report on the proposed Wingspread Beach project in the Aptos area was finally released to the public last Thursday.

Conference Associates, the company that wants to develop a project that would combine vacation rental and conference facilities with a performing arts complex on the 66-acre site across the freeway from Cabrillo College, immediately asserted that the EIR proves that the project could be developed without environmental damage and that it would provide an economic bonanza for the county.

The completion of the EIR is the latest development in the bitter struggle over what use the valuable piece of land that is owned by the University of California, but is under a 99-year lease to Conference Associates, should be put to.

The ambitious plans of Conference Associates, an arm of the Palo Alto development firm of Hare, Brewer and Kelley, have run head-on into the desire of many area residents and environmental groups to make the property an adjunct of the adjacent New Brighton Beach State Park, or put it to similar use.

Those groups currently have the upper hand because the environmentally oriented majority of the Board of Supervisors has clamped zoning on the property that makes park use its "preferred use" and allows for an "alternative use" that would severely limit a private development.

All of which means that nothing approaching the density and size of the original Wingspread Beach proposal will be allowed on the property unless the developers can push through an amendment to the regulations now in effect. Conference Associates boss Ryland Kelley has now seized on the EIR as confirming his longstanding assertions that the fears expressed that Wingspread would overtax the resources of the property are groundless. Presumably, Kelley would use the EIR, as he interprets it, as ammunition for a revision that would allow the Wingspread development.

Indeed, Kelley's firm issued a press release simultaneously with the release of the EIR by the county, in which he said, in effect, that the EIR provides conclusive evidence that the pluses that Wingspread Beach would bring to the county far

outnumber the minuses.

The EIR, incidentally, while paid for by the applicant (Conference Associates), was prepared by the Capitola firm of Coats Consulting under the guidance of the county planning department, so that its preparation was independent of the applicant.

In the press release, Conference Associates asserts that the EIR "concludes that there are no significant environmental problems which cannot be solved and that the proposal (Wingspread) would produce substantial net benefits from new jobs, taxes, and cultural facilities."

It goes on to take a dig at the liberal board majority: "The EIR indicates that the only significant problems of the ... proposal are the severe limitations on development recently imposed by the county Board of Supervisors."

The press release stresses the "dramati-

cally favorable financial benefits to the county — \$18 million in new net revenues over the next decade" of a Wingspread-type development, as opposed to a park and campsite use, which "would actually cost the county money."

Conference Associates also claims that the EIR "demonstrates that traffic — a major concern expressed by the Board of Supervisors —

would actually move better after Wingspread is built if certain improvements are made as part of the project."

It is true, as the press release says, that the EIR outlines methods by which most of the environmental impacts that Wingspread could make on the property and the neighborhood could be mitigated. But some of those negative impacts appear to be more serious

than is suggested in the press release.

For example, the EIR noted that in order to meet existing regulations concerning building on erodible soil, it would be advisable to "eliminate any construction activity within 'high erosion' areas" and certain other areas, which would

sharply reduce the acreage available for development.

In the long run, however, the decision over the use of the Porter-Sesnon property is likely to be a political one rather than one based merely on technical data.