

Wingspread foes to take case to county voters

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Opponents of the Wingspread Beach proposal will go to Santa Cruz County voters to stop the high-density development, and to limit growth throughout the county.

A group calling itself the Committee for Neighborhood and Coastal Protection, composed of many outspoken opponents of Wingspread, announced last week it would begin collecting signatures to place a growth-limiting initiative on the November ballot.

The measure, if passed, would require a four-fifths vote of the county Board of Supervisors to raise density limits from those given in the county General Plan or Local Coastal Plan.

Committee members said Wingspread was merely the "catalyst" for the initiative, which is an attempt to limit growth, except in rare cases, to what is currently allowed in the

county's land-use laws.

The initiative does, however, have the potential to stop Wingspread. The measure would be retroactive in the sense it would apply to density limits currently in effect. As such, the initiative could nullify the supervisors' final vote on Wingspread. The board tentatively approved the project in a 3-2 vote in March.

The measure, its advocates said, is a response to rapid growth in the county over the last two decades — growth that has lowered the quality of life, they said, by taking away open spaces, crowding county roads, and overburdening public services.

The supervisors' vote on Wingspread was a "frightening precedent," said Seacliff resident Greg Hudson at a press conference in Santa Cruz last Tuesday to announce the initiative drive. The episode shows how a neighborhood can be devastated, despite the strongly

expressed wishes of the residents, by a simple majority of the board lifting density limits, Hudson said.

Barney Bricmont, a Live Oak resident and member of the

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Live Oak School District board, said many of the problems facing Live Oak now are the result of the board repeatedly approving projects that exceeded General Plan density limits.

Celia Scott Von Der Muhll called the Wingspread vote the "tip of the iceberg" of excessive growth. She called the county's Local Coastal Plan and General Plan the county's "constitution for growth."

"They should not just be changed by a simple majority," she said. "What we want is a substantial consensus in the community."

The supervisors face "strong and continuous" pressure to amend the General Plan and

Local Coastal Plan to allow undesirable high-density development that will further degrade the coastal areas, the committee said in a prepared statement.

"Such amendments will irreversibly alter the existing desirable character of ... neighborhoods and unique coastal resources" in a way that violates the wishes of county residents and the state Coastal Act, the committee said.

The initiative would strengthen the provisions of the

county's land-use laws while allowing changes desired by a large majority of the public, the committee said.

Supervisor Gary Patton, an outspoken opponent of Wingspread and a member of the minority voting against it, said the initiative "would be the people of the county saying 'we do regard the General Plan as kind of a constitution.'"

Patton said he had not yet read the initiative, but said if it were well-drawn, it would likely appeal to those people receiving the impression developers can do almost anything they want by swinging one vote on the board.

Patton, who has made numerous anti-development statements in his race for reelection, said, "A lot of people, with respect to Wingspread, got the idea that three members of the Board of Supervisors at any time could change the General Plan, which they (the people) thought they could rely on."

The initiative would make the General Plan more important than it now is, Patton said. That idea is probably comforting to people who are beginning to see the General Plan as poor protection from undesirable growth, "people who sort of see the future in the wings," the supervisor said.

Among members of the committee are Stephanie Harlan, a Capitola City Council member; Vickie Powell-Murray, co-founder of Friends of Porter Sesnon, a coalition opposing Wingspread; Rosalie Kraft, a member of the coalition and resident of the neighborhood that would be affected by Wingspread; and Hal Levin, a member of the Sierra Club.

The committee must collect nearly 8,000 valid signatures by June 22. If it succeeds, the issue will go before the supervisors 30 days later. The board could then either adopt the measure or place it on the ballot.

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REFERENCE