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Posted on Mon, Dec. 11, 2006

Monday, Dec 11, 2006

SEAWALL PLAN HAS SUPPORT

Pebble Beach: Coastal Commission considers proposal for fifth hole

By JIM JOHNSON
 Herald Salinas Bureau

Eight years after relocating its fifth hole closer to the ocean, the Pebble Beach Co. wants to build a seawall to head off potential erosion on the coastal bluffs below the green on the par-3 No. 5 at its Pebble Beach Golf Links course.

The seawall, said Executive Vice President Mark Stilwell, is the only option to avoid losing the hole entirely.

"It's a necessary project," Stilwell said. "We have the U.S. Open coming back in 2010 and to us Pebble Beach is the No. 1 golf course in the world. It's become one of the signature holes on the course. It's important that we protect it for all the golfers and other folks who use it."

But local environmentalists object to the seawall because, they say, it moves erosion elsewhere, destroying beach area and contributing to a cumulative effect of other "coastal armoring." And, they say the Pebble Beach Co. knew the risks when it moved the hole closer to the ocean, and that there are other, less-damaging alternatives.

"It's a death by a thousand cuts," said Ximena Waissbluth, chairwoman of Surfrider Foundation Monterey. "A little seawall here and a little seawall there, and before you know it you're losing your beaches and your beautiful coastline. We are strongly opposed to the seawall."

The state Coastal Commission staff has recommended approval of the seawall, which would cover a 160-foot-long section of the coastal bluff-face up to a 22-foot height and be constructed using reinforced concrete with steel tiebacks and an artificial stone face.

The staff has also recommended conditions with its approval that would include better public access to the beach below, and a shoreline management plan that will study how to avoid future seawalls, analyze and monitor the impact of the existing seawalls on the area's shoreline, and develop alternatives.

The Coastal Commission will review the Pebble Beach Co. permit application at its Wednesday meeting at the Hyatt Regency Embarcadero in San Francisco.

The Pebble Beach Co. already has the support of Supervisor Dave Potter, who serves on the Coastal Commission.

Potter said he believes the seawall should be approved because it will be nearly indistinguishable from the rest of the coastline, it's an appropriate size, and has been delayed long enough. He said the Pebble Beach Co. has been successful in previous seawall construction efforts along the golf links shoreline.

"If people ask me what a good coastal protection project looks like, I would point them to that area," Potter said. "I would hope it gets approved. It's been knocked around enough."

In 1998, the Pebble Beach Co. moved the fifth hole to its current location along the bluffs between Stillwater Cove Pier and Arrowhead Point after the company was finally able to purchase the coastal land from the Jenkins family.

A geotechnical report at the time found that concerns about potential erosion at the site, and the necessity of seawalls and retaining walls, could be headed off through drainage and landscaping improvements.

Nevertheless, ongoing erosion occurred in the area, and was accelerated by storms in 2003-04 that contributed to a landslide. The Pebble Beach Co. then asked for, and received, an emergency permit from the Coastal Commission for work to control the slide.

Stilwell said the original geotechnical report could not have anticipated the full extent of



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"subsurface conditions" and the effect of "100-year storms" on the bluffs.

A follow-up permit application requested permanent seawalls at the fifth hole tee and green, but after a commission hearing in April 2005, the Pebble Beach Co. withdrew its application.

Stilwell said issues raised by the commission prompted the Pebble Beach Co. to revamp its application. The current application includes a request for a single seawall below the No. 5 green only. Instead of constructing a second seawall to protect the fifth tee, it will be relocated further inland to avoid the effects of erosion.

The Coastal Commission staff agreed with the Pebble Beach Co.'s contention that the fifth green can't be moved or altered in a similar fashion.

Any "alteration, relocation or loss of critical components" of the fifth green is not feasible, and would "negatively affect the unique, challenging shot provided by the configuration of the hole across the bluff," said a staff report

But the Surfrider Foundation's attorney, Todd Cardiff of the San Diego-based Coast Law Group, said such an argument is absurd considering that the Pebble Beach Co. freely chose to relocate the hole closer to the coast while being fully aware of the relative dangers of such a move.

He said the seawall is a direct result of the relocation and, as such, is a violation of coastal protection laws.

"The reality is they don't want to (move the hole back) and they'd rather take a public beach," Cardiff said. "It must be realized that prior to 1998 the fifth hole was located inland."

Cardiff said the seawall will inevitably result in the loss of public beach in the area and simply building an access way to what remains of the beach is not a legitimate, or legal, mitigation. Cardiff has sent a series of letters to the Coastal Commission regarding the issue.

Stilwell acknowledged the loss of beach but said the golf course is much more heavily used than the beach.

Weissbluth said the Foundation will consider legal action if the seawall permit is approved.

The construction of seawalls and coastal armoring has drawn controversy in the Monterey Bay area in recent years, and the issue has been the subject of discussion during the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary management plan process.

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