

Planning commission can't help equestrian center supporters

By CHRIS COUNTS

THOSE WHO are trying to prevent the Pebble Beach Equestrian Center from closing pled their case before the Monterey County Planning Commission Wednesday. But they were told there was nothing the commission could do.

The Pebble Beach Company announced March 4 that it was shutting down the equestrian center, which turns 100 years old this year. The company cited the center's lack of profitability and the need for \$15 million of renovations as the reasons for the closure.

At Wednesday's hearing, county planner Anna Quenga told the planning commission that a 1984 agreement between the Pebble Beach Company and the county required the company to operate the equestrian center — but only for 10 years. "There are no Del Monte Forest policies that require or allow the county to enforce maintaining operation of the equestrian center," she said.

Quenga also noted that in 2000, as part of a private agreement between the Pebble Beach Company and Del Monte Forest Property Owners, a provision stated that "the existing equestrian center will not be taken out of operation or materially reduced in scope by the Pebble Beach Company until a new equestrian center on land owned by the company is fully operational," but she also said any dispute between the company and the residents group over whether that agreement is still in effect is a private matter.

"The county does not have a basis to intercede in the decisions of the Pebble Beach Company to close the equestrian

center," Quenga said.

Representing the Pebble Beach Company, former executive vice president Mark Stilwell told the planning commission that he agreed with Quenga's assessment.

Several supporters of the equestrian center spoke out against the closure during the hearing, including Thea Montella of Pebble Beach, who called the downfall of the facility "an orchestrated and deliberate failure."

'Monument' to horse culture

Another supporter, Ashley Kelly, called the center "a monument to West Coast horse culture." She contended the center has suffered from "slow motion demolition by willful neglect and mismanagement."

Horse enthusiast Laura Fenwick urged the planning commission to halt the teardown of the center. "I'm just asking for more time for this before it's demolished," Fenwick said.

Supporter Lisa Baca, meanwhile, asked that a historical study be done on the center.

Planning commissioner Martha Diehl said she first rode a horse at the equestrian center when she was just 6. But she agreed there is little the planning commission can do regarding its closing.

"I'm aware of the situation and share the sadness," Diehl said. "A lot of things take a long time, and some of these decisions were made a long time ago — just because language allows something, it doesn't mean that it requires it. We're stuck with what's on paper."

Boarding services will continue to be offered through June 30. Equestrians will still be able to access Pebble Beach's trails, according to the company.

Dispute over whether a contract exists is a private one, county says
