

## **A View From the Front Line**

Glenn Cornell is the President of the Rolling Hills Riviera Homeowners Association.

Some members from the organization live in single-family homes directly across Western Avenue from the Ponte Vista site. These folks live in the City of Ranch Palos Verdes and technically not in San Pedro, where Ponte Vista is located. I feel residents of Rolling Hills Riviera have the largest stake, as homeowners, to whatever is built within Ponte Vista.

Glenn wrote a "President's Message" for the October, 2006 issue of "The Rolling Stones", which is the newsletter for the homeowners association. I have asked and been granted permission to print Mr. Cornell's message because I feel opinions from such important stakeholders, should be read.

### **President's Message**

Elitists. You're elitists. I'm one, too. Although none of us thinks of ourselves that way, we are. Everyone who favors single family housing is an elitist -- at least according to Robert Bisno.

*The Daily Breeze* has been more than a little critical of Bisno Development's plans for the old Navy property. To its credit, it allowed the developer to reply. What followed was not a response from a "spokesman" or other P.R. type. Rather, an article entitled "The Truth about Ponte Vista" appeared on September 9 over the name of Mr. Bisno himself. If you missed it, I encourage you to rummage through your old newspapers for a copy. It is an eye opener.

Mr. Bisno, who happens to be an attorney, takes a handful of premises, assumes they are true, and then builds his article around them. His anchoring arguments are that that the San Pedro area needs "affordable" housing, that people in the area agree with this view, and that those who oppose his plans for 2300 condominiums on the property are elitists.

Whew! Where to begin?

First, the tract is already zoned R-1. The officials responsible for that determination must suffer from "elitism" as well, since they have been concluding for years that single family homes represent the best use of the land in question. By Mr. Bisno's logic, all R-1 zoning is "elitist" because it prevents the construction of high density (and, presumably, lower cost) units. I am curious to know where Mr. Bisno lives. I suspect it is in an area that has many restrictions on land use; that is probably one of the very reasons he chose a home there.

Though affordability is a key part of his pitch, Mr. Bisno neglects to define the term. This is a significant lapse. What he means may well be quite different from what prospective buyers envision. He says he anticipates that the units will start in the "high \$300,000's."

That's hardly a firm commitment on his part. Moreover, we're not told the number of units which will be offered at that price or the price of the average unit. In fact, if Mr. Bisno is to placate his financial backers, "affordable" will mean that he will charge the most the market will bear for every condo he is permitted to build. He would be an unusual real estate developer if he does not.

Mr. Bisno would no doubt counter that he has petition signatures which give the thumbs up to his plans. He refers to "4,800 supporters." What I am not clear about is what those supporters support. In recent months, I have had occasion to hear petition gatherers at Albertson's and Trader Joe's approach shoppers about supporting affordable housing in senior housing. What I never heard was a signature-gatherer ask anyone to support 2300 new condo units along Western Avenue. Indeed, I never heard any of the gatherers include that crucial fact in any of the comments they made to those who stopped and displayed any interest in their petition. It makes you wonder how many people would have lent their support to that petition.

I could go on, but you get the idea. 2300 new housing units in this area is an exceedingly bad idea. Mr. Bisno bought the property knowing it was zoned R-1. Evidently, he thought he could bend things to his will, get the zoning changed to allow a high-density development on the land, and thereby let him turn a bigger profit on the project. That was his gamble. If he wins, we will be the losers.

I'm sorry to report that Councilwoman Janice Hahn appears to be waffling on her commitment to keep the land zoned R-1. At a speech she delivered recently in San Pedro, she suggested that she is now open to allowing more units on the property than are permitted under the R-1 restriction. In August, I thought she had gotten the message and was prepared to stand by the current zoning. Perhaps, she has forgotten. If so, it is up to each of us to remind her. We don't want more traffic; we contend with far more than our share. We don't want more pollution; we have more than is healthy. Our infrastructure is stretched beyond its capacity already. Mr. Bisno doesn't live here. He won't have to figure out how to apply another patch when something fails. We're the ones who will be left to cope with the mess.

Thank you,

Glenn Cornell