

Random Lengths April 6-19, 2007

Activists form R-I Coalition

Opponents Battle Bisno Development to the Finish

By Terelle Jerricks, *Editor*

On Mar. 23, a collection of community organizations and community members opposed to the Ponte Vista project announced the formation of the R neighborhoods are 1 coalition to force Bisno Development to adhere to the R-I zoning of the former Navy housing that allows only 500 single family dwellings on the 61-acre site.

"R neighborhoods are 1 is a true grassroots movement that has sprung up in response to a Westside developer seeking to impose a massive project with huge potential for traffic and population impacts on our libraries, schools and roads," said Andy Mardesich, president of the San Pedro and Peninsula Homeowners Coalition, a coalition of 13 resident associations. "It's amazing to see how many people are moved*to take action."

The stated aim of this diverse coalition of community activists, homeowner associations, and Neighborhood Councils is to keep Ponte Vista zoned as RI, a designation that allows for 500 single family homes to be on the 61-acre plot of former navy land.

Community activist Doug Epperhart, spokesperson for the new coalition, pointedly noted, "Ponte Vista has RI zoning and they should keep I the RI zoning, and there are a helluva lot of people in San Pedro who agree with that."

The group's website explains that its name "refers not only to its mission of keeping the RI zoning at Ponte Vista; it also speaks to the unifying force of preserving our heritage (our neighborhoods are one)."

"There are a lot of myths that are being pushed by the developer versus reality," Epperhart stated. "The first reality is this: believe it or not, the Harbor area is very crowded in terms of population density. If you look at the square miles

of density of Los Angeles versus Harbor Area, the Harbor Area is denser than the Westside;'

Not to be outdone however, on Mar. 29, the Bisno Development Corporation delivered an additional 3,400 new petition signatures in support, of the project to Councilwoman Janice Hahn bringing their total to 10,370.

However, questions as to legitimacy of the signatures gathered by Bisno Development have abounded given that professional signature gatherers were hired, and petitions were presented as registering support for "affordable housing."

Elise Swanson, the public relations director for Bisno Development, explained that the gatherers were specially trained and given talking points to read from in addition to the Ponte Vista brochure.

Councilwoman Hahn, who only recently returned from a three-day trip to Washington D.C. with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, has not yet studied the signatures. In response to the delivery she issued a statement, "The Ponte Vista project is a hot topic in San Pedro and I receive letters and postcards in my office about the project almost daily; and I encourage everyone to weigh in.

I intend to forward the letters and postcards that I receive from people regarding the project to my advisory group; and I expect the group to consider the input from the community as they move forward with creating a specific plan for the site."