

Advisory body against SP condo plan

By Donna Littlejohn, Staff Writer
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Drawing a unanimous and packed house, a planning advisory panel Tuesday recommended restricting a developer from building as many as 18 condominiums on the former McCowan's Market site in a residential neighborhood of San Pedro.

"We absolutely believe that multi-unit housing would destroy our neighborhood," said Patricia Almquist, who lives a block away from 20th and Walker streets, where the market stood for more than 60 years. "It will put a strain on our utilities and add more traffic and density that's not wanted or needed."

She was one of a string of speakers in the 200-member audience who all spoke against condominiums and in favor of the restriction, saying condominiums would ruin the quiet, residential character of their hillside community. No one spoke in favor of the project.

The so-called "Q" (or "qualified") classification or condition was proposed by Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who said her office was deluged by letters, e-mails and telephone calls in the wake of an announcement that a developer planned to construct a high-density complex - allowed under city zoning laws - on the market site.

"I have yet to receive one constituent request for high-density condos in this location," Hahn told the commissioners.

The recommendation of the Harbor Area Planning Commission now goes to the Los Angeles City Planning and Land Use Committee and should reach the City Council for a final decision in April or May.

Michael Rosenthal, who purchased the market last summer and remodeled it, only to announce he was closing it in December due to lack of business, did not attend the

hearing. But when contacted by telephone after the hearing, he said he was not surprised by the outcome and is planning a legal challenge.

Rosenthal said he had filed an objection with the city planning department before the meeting.

"We don't feel they have the legal right to do this," Rosenthal said. "So we're waiting to see what happens."

Despite efforts to reach a compromise between Rosenthal and the neighbors earlier this year, the situation appeared to come to a stalemate as Hahn's office moved ahead with the Q condition option.

Residents, who quickly formed the Vista del Oro Neighbors Against Condos when news of the condominium plans circulated, rallied to back the Q condition, a provision that would be attached to the market's commercial property limiting the number of homes that could be built.

Bolstered by support from the local neighborhood council, neighbors surrounding the project filled the Harbor Department hearing room to capacity for the late afternoon meeting.

Many said they still missed the market.

"Losing McCowan's was very disappointing to everyone in San Pedro," said Bruce Krause. "We lost a large part of our neighborhood."

Antonia Ciaramitaro, speaking in a heavy Italian accent, brought along several receipts she had from McCowan's to prove how much she used the store.

"Why does he think we are so stupid?" she said.

But most appealed to keeping San Pedro's single-family neighborhoods intact.

"The neighborhoods in San Pedro are great places with great people and that's what we want them to remain," said Doug Epperhart of the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council. "We're not Hollywood, we're not Pico Union, we're San Pedro."

"We have these pockets around this town that are unique," said Stephanie Mardesich.

"Once you take that away, you can never get it back