

The Daily Breeze

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Another high-rise condo for San Pedro?

Preliminary plans call for an 18-story tower at Harbor and Fifth. Residents express concerns.

By Donna Littlejohn

Staff Writer

Despite a persistent real estate slump, developers want to build yet another condominium high-rise in San Pedro.

Galaxy Commercial Holding is in escrow for the corner property at Harbor Boulevard and Fifth Street, where the popular Grinder restaurant now sits. Galaxy developers this week unveiled their preliminary plans to build an 18-story, very narrow condominium tower with underground parking and retail on the ground floor.

"We think San Pedro is a unique market," said Steve Cienfuegos, vice president of construction for Galaxy Commercial Holding. "It's got a lot of appeal because of the Ports O' Call area and it's on the water."

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn has asked the developer to spend more time meeting with the community and neighborhood council about the project.

"Galaxy is playing a big role in our downtown San Pedro revitalization and more market-rate housing is welcome," she said. But Hahn said she also expects to see community input "reflected in the final project."

Concern already has been raised about how the contemporary structure would blend - or not - with the community's historic, 10-story city hall built in the early 1900s and only a block away at Sixth Street and Harbor Boulevard.

"I'm worried it will overshadow the city hall," said Sue Castillo, chairwoman of the planning and land use subcommittee for the Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council. "Building this huge, glitzy thing next to a historic building will be such a contrast in urban design that it would be jarring."

The new project would feature lots of glass, Cienfuegos said.

The likelihood of blocked views for two other condominium towers behind the Grinder also is prompting some consternation.

Castillo said efforts should be made to plan Harbor Boulevard as a whole.

During waterfront redevelopment workshops, many residents said they didn't want any buildings over five stories.

About a block behind the site, Galaxy also is building the 16-story Vue condominium at Fifth and Palos Verdes streets. And another 18-story project, the Palos Verdes Urban Village, is proposed for property right behind the Grinder corner.

"It is in front of the Vue, so there will be some views that will be impacted," Cienfuegos said. But he added that the new development would be positioned to minimize any loss of views.

Cienfuegos stressed that the new project, a rectangular building with 158 market-rate condominiums dubbed "G8" by the developer for now, is still in a very preliminary stage. The site is 33,400 square feet and sits just north of the Sunrise Motel at 525 S. Harbor Blvd. on the same block.

Several residents said the Grinder also will be missed should it be demolished to make way for the development.

Lorraine Ornelas, a volunteer at the Los Angeles Maritime Museum across the street, said she was "crushed" when she heard the restaurant, built in 1979, might be demolished.

"That's where my family and I have gone for Mother's Day breakfasts for years," she said.

Plans for the condominiums are only conceptual, Cienfuegos said.

"We're still going through the entitlement process and planning approvals," he said. "This is purely preliminary and conceptual at this time. We don't have specific (plans)."

He envisions the retail space on the corner including possibly a steakhouse at the street level.

Cienfuegos showed a rendering of the G8 building Thursday night at a meeting of the residents panel overseeing downtown San Pedro redevelopment.

It all came as a surprise to panel members and those in the audience who asked that the developer return with drawings showing neighboring buildings to give the community more of an overall perspective.

"I need to see how it fits in with what's already there," said Diana Nave, a member of the Northwest San Pedro Neighborhood Council, who attended the meeting. "Nothing surprises me in terms of development in San Pedro anymore."

Several members of the Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council requested that they be given a full report by the developer when they meet in November.

"I'm excited about all of these great projects but would like to see it come before the community," said neighborhood council President Joe Gatlin.

"We're concerned about the height, the density," he said. "We're trying to build a San Pedro we're all going to be proud of."

Galaxy was also interested earlier this year in buying an adjacent parcel being planned for the Palos Verdes Urban Village, which would be between the Vue and G8. For now, that remains in the hands of Omninet Capital of Beverly Hills, which is planning to move forward with the proposal for an 18-story, \$110 million condominium development at 550 S. Palos Verdes St.

Cienfuegos said he had no comment about whether Galaxy was still interested in purchasing that project site as well.

"Galaxy has a commitment to San Pedro," he said. "We see it as an exciting growth opportunity. We want to open that area up for more pedestrian use."

San Pedro, he said, "is an exciting place to live and work. We just want to provide housing."

The other alternative is just to keep doing it the way it's always been done. I think that is not a very good idea, because people should be able to look at older posts and not have to ask themselves, "what the hell is he talking about?"

Thoughts?