

# Bisno project is beautiful, but it can't hide ugly numbers

by Steve Marconi

Let's be honest here. The Ponte Vista development is beautiful.

No, really. As I write this, I'm as sober as a country preacher. No need for a urine test. I don't have a gun pointed at my head. I'm not even getting a free dinner to say this.

In fact, if there's something we can all agree on, the 2,300-unit gated community would be a marvelous place to live. I certainly can see the attraction for some of our senior citizens, particularly those living in a huge house they no longer need or the arthritis sufferers who dread yet another climb up a flight of stairs. All of the senior housing will be one level.

You have to love the plans for shuttle buses for those who can't or don't want to drive, plus an on-site convenience store to reduce the need for those irritating little trips just for a half-gallon of milk or bread.

There will also be a coffee shop because, as we all know, modern Americans can't start the day without their coffee.

Yes, Bob Bisno has thought of just about everything.

Well, almost everything.

In a perfect world, Ponte Vista would be marvelous. Unfortunately, the only way into this

perfect world is Western Avenue, and there's the rub.

I was ready to buy one of those condos myself the other day (I just hate to admit I qualify for senior housing) after talking with the charming Elise Swanson, Ponte Vista's vice president for public affairs. Swanson is the kind of person who could sell air conditioning in the Arctic. What she can't do, however, is make the traffic issue go away.

It's a divisive topic, and I think I've finally got a handle on who is on which side.

The way I see it, the vast majority in favor of the original plan are seniors enticed by what Bisno is offering and San Pedrans who don't have to use Western Avenue regularly.

Against the plan, probably in any form, are the San Pedro and Rancho Palos Verdes residents who have no choice but to use Western Avenue every day, either to commute to work, drive their kids to school, shop for groceries, pick up prescriptions, go to Home Depot, eat out or visit their favorite coffee place.

This latter group, which includes me, looks at all the tables and maps in that massive draft environmental impact report, checks all those numbers and squiggly

lines (with a magnifying glass) and can see that traffic at many key points will double with Ponte Vista.

When the city's engineers tell us that with mitigation the project will have "no significant impact" on traffic, we collectively shake our heads in wonderment.

To borrow a phrase from the political arena, it all seems like "voodoo math" to me.

Many others agree, including John Greenwood and Dan Dixon, two members of the Ponte Vista Community Advisory Committee, put together by Councilwoman Janice Hahn to collect input and come up with a specific plan for the Ponte Vista property.

Greenwood's reaction to the city Department of Transportation's letter approving the 2,300-unit proposal was incredulity.

"I have had a series, two or three different letters, to DOT and said, basically, you're nuts. I phrased it much nicer than that, but I think that what they have is a model that is not accurate at all."

Greenwood used the excellent example of what's happened in West Los Angeles. All of the new developments in that area "went

through DOT analysis, and yet it's a nightmare. There's something screwed up there with the process. I think DOT needs to completely rethink the way they work," he said. "They're relying on numbers provided by the developer.... I haven't seen much evidence that they've done much independent analysis.

"I don't think their numbers work here. I think that draft EIR is drastically

He said there are four or five areas "where the developer's analysis is wrong, enough that it needs to be redone. I hope DOT will look at this objectively. We want the model to reflect reality."

Greenwood notes, for instance, that the numbers in the DEIR reflect only four trips per day for each unit. In other words, two adults in the home leave and return to their house only once each day—and never make another trip anywhere.

"It looks on the face of it that it won't work," Greenwood said.

"They just basically have made mistakes on every significant thing — the number of students, people per unit, trips, traffic counts. They counted it when the sinkhole was there.

"All of those together, any rational person listening to what

they did would say, 'No, that's , not right' Then you ask, 'How do you fix that?' It's a do-over."

Dixon concurs.

"Are these numbers real?" he asked. "Are we doing the community a service by using these numbers as a resource for what this will do to the community? I think the figure that the developer has used of 1.88 persons per unit in the development is simply — I hate to use buzzwords — is a fantasy. It is not the truth."

Dixon believes the Automated Traffic Surveillance and Control system will have a mitigating effect, but, "We just ask the logical question: At which point is it impossible for ATSAC to not mitigate anymore?"

He also uses the example of West L.A. and how that has gone so wrong.

"People on the Westside have given up going downtown in the evening because it is impossible," Dixon said. "The city looks to the renaissance of downtown (Los Angeles), but if people can't get there..."

Dixon fears that same kind of urban disaster "can only come sooner than later to this part of town with the amount of development being proposed or under way in San Pedro. The

bottom line: I personally believe the city is deluding itself.

"No way yet that anyone has shown me that with whatever mitigations are proposed that it won't be worse, but they haven't shown that at all. But they are legally correct in using numbers that the city accepts as valid.

"I think I can say I don't

blame Bisno for using these numbers," Dixon said, noting that there are many numbers one can use, and, "They have chosen those most advantageous to them. Clearly anyone can look at a table of numbers and see what they want to see."

City traffic engineer Mike Begheri, who signed off on the approval for 2,300 units, obvi-

ously liked what he saw. As he explained it, "A signalized intersection (using ATSAC) can handle 1,500 moves... an hour," not counting vehicles making right-hand turns.

"The capacity is 1,500. As you get closer to capacity, it starts to bog down, slow down. If you have 1,500, technically that intersection fails." What does

that mean? "Nobody moves ... they move, but experience excessive delay.

"What we're saying is that when the project is built in 2010, the amount of traffic expected, including traffic from the project, can be handled by the street system."

When pressed, however, he hedged his bets. "The numbers

are what's in the book. They're a forecast. It's not an exact science."

I prefer the way Dixon put it. "There are lies, damn lies and statistics. That about sums it up."

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