

Changes to San Pedro's Ponte Vista project debuts today

By Donna Littlejohn, Staff Writer

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Tight-lipped developers will finally unveil possible changes to San Pedro's Ponte Vista housing development at an open house from 4 to 8 p.m. today.

This much is confirmed: The project will be downsized from the current 1,950 units. But developers Wednesday refused to say by how much, deferring to the open house event where they said all of those questions will be answered.

"There is definitely a reduction in the number of housing units," said Jim Oswald, who conducted some 60 interviews with residents over the past month. Oswald is a facilitator hired by the developers to get the project back on track in time for an April 9 hearing.

City planners last year recommended that the project be limited to 775 to 1,200 condominiums on the 62.5-acre former military housing site along Western Avenue, across from Green Hills Cemetery.

Developers initially rolled out plans to build 2,300 homes. That number was whittled down during community meetings but never to a level low enough to satisfy opponents who said the project would produce too much traffic on already congested Western Avenue.

Oswald said there were "no real surprises" in what came out of his personal interviews.

"A lot of people talked about traffic and the impact of traffic generated by the project," he said. "There were concerns about the traffic data (used) and concerns about traffic light synchronization.

"The next big topic was density and the housing mix - people said that it was important for it to be compatible with the surrounding community. And a lot of people said they liked the idea of including open (public park) space."

The open house will be unstructured, with Oswald and representatives from DLJ Real Estate Capital Partners, a subsidiary of Credit Suisse, on hand to answer questions and to gather more comments.

"We're just trying to put the information out there and allow people to write down their comments and questions," Oswald said. "We have tons of post-it notes."

The format will include a series of "information stations that people can walk around to get a big-picture overview," Oswald said. "We're trying to give people an overview of the project background and history, we're trying to give people an idea of what was talked about in the interviews."

But most importantly, he said, developers will introduce what Oswald is calling "emerging directions."

Those presumably are elements designed to answer many of the public complaints about the earlier designs.

"What's important are those emerging directions which are really forming the basis of the land-use concept that's going forward" to the Los Angeles Planning Commission on April 9, Oswald said.

The possibility of applying a "density bonus" - a city provision that allows additional units to be built if they are dedicated to low-income residents - may be kept in play under the new plans, Oswald

indicated.

Other issues, including fields for Eastview Little League, remain open questions, he said.

Plans for a new road linking Ponte Vista to Gaffey Street on the east in order to lessen Western Avenue traffic impacts appear to have been finally nixed.

Lt. Col. Jon Ramer, who oversees the military fuel depot property adjacent to the home site, said any access roads across the facility would be rejected.

Prospective Ponte Vista residents, Ramer conceded, also should be warned about occasional vapors emitted by the neighboring fuel depot site.

Traffic continues to be the main sticking point among residents who have organized a group to limit development on the land to single-family homes only.

"If you like the idea of mass traffic jams at peak hours of the day, then sign on with Ponte Vista," wrote John Stinson, a neighborhood council officer, in a recent e-mail to community members. "You will have one way in and out of the project. You and thousands of other cars."