

# Commission turns down Ponte Vista

By Sandy Mazza, Staff Writer

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Union members, including Raul Rodriguez of Laborer s Local 802, center, said the project would bring needed jobs to the area. (Robert Casillas / Staff Photographer)

A plan to build 1,950 homes on a 62.5-acre site in San Pedro was unanimously denied Thursday by the Los Angeles Planning Commission.

But there is still hope for proponents of the Ponte Vista housing project, who have been fighting community opposition for three years.

The commission asked Bisno Development Co. to return in three months with two viable plans. One, which the developer informally proposed Thursday morning, would pare the project down to 1,395 housing units. The other, which city staff recommended, would reduce the number of homes even further, to between 775 and 886.

"I just want today not to take a step back, but to step forward," Commissioner Diego Cardoso said. "Not to say, 'Oh, we're going to deny it.' It's so valuable for us at this time - with the economy and all the issues we face - to move forward. This is an amazing development."

Staff members told the commission it will likely take more than three months to complete two new sets of environmental and traffic studies.

Commissioner Sean Burton said he hopes the developer and community can forge a compromise in the meantime.

"Ideally, in the next few months, we don't have a competing proposal, we have consensus," Burton said.

Hundreds of San Pedro residents and business owners on both sides of the issue packed Los Angeles City Hall for the hearing.

Ponte Vista opponents said traffic on Western Avenue, the main artery to the development, is already

bad and could become unbearable if thousands of new residents flood the area.

"This is about the legacy we leave to our future generations," said resident James Campeau. "This should be in conjunction with public transportation. Move this project to downtown San Pedro."

Rancho Palos Verdes Mayor Steve Wolowicz and Lomita Associate Planner Alicia Heideman asked the commission to deny the plan for a former Navy housing site on Western Avenue across from Green Hills Memorial Park.

"The project is just too large," Wolowicz said. "The project will get done, but at this scale it will become a negative legacy of decisions that can go awry."

The current plan has a higher housing density than in any other nearby community, and opponents argue that it would be out of place because it is several miles from a freeway.

Backers of the proposal, wearing yellow "Ponte Vista Supporter" stickers, urged the commission to quickly adopt a development plan.

"Traffic means people. People mean business, and that's what everybody wants," said San Pedro resident Angie Papadakis. "Please let us have Ponte Vista."

Dozens of union workers who could potentially be hired to help build the project attended the hearing, and said it would bring hundreds of needed jobs and affordable housing to the area.

Los Angeles Councilwoman Janice Hahn called the 1,950 proposed housing units "very troubling," but praised the developer for agreeing to reduce the number.

"In my eight years as a councilwoman, no development project has been as controversial as Ponte Vista. It has divided friendly neighbors. On the other hand, it brought us together - it's what everybody talks about.

"I know that many people in the community want to see this project go away. I'm willing to allow a couple more months to try to work something out."

Last year, Bob Bisno, the former head of the development team, was removed from the position and replaced with a large investor in the project, Credit Suisse Bank. The new team has focused on garnering community support.

When the project was proposed about three years ago, it called for 2,300 housing units.

To further reduce the project from 1,950 to 1,395, Bisno Development Co. representative Allan Abshez said Thursday that the company would cut 850 homes reserved for seniors to 380, reduce 1,000 affordable multifamily homes to 380, and build 630 of the pricier town homes.

Community amenities will include walkways, running paths, and landscaping, and the construction will be environmentally friendly, Abshez said.

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