

# Grappling with '10,000-pound gorilla'

**SAN PEDRO:** How PonteVista project will deal with traffic on Western is the focus as debate opens on the main EIR issue.

By Donna Littlejohn

DAILY BREEZE

The divide was clear from what they wore on their lapels — "Ponte Vista Supporter," declared the bright yellow stickers worn by supporters of the 2,300-home project planned for Western Avenue in San Pedro.

On the other side: "RI" buttons.

Last week's public meeting officially opened the debate over the proposed condominium development, drawing more than 100 supporters and opponents of the project. With the draft environmental study released Nov. 2, members of the public now have until Jan. 30 to weigh in on what they think.

The developer, Bob Bisno, reiterated last week that he would not build an RI project, which is the current zoning on the property and is the preferred alternative for opponents of Ponte Vista.

"I don't plan to develop single-family residences," Bisno said.

When he purchased the prop-

erty for \$125 million, Bisno said he knew traffic issues would be the "10,000-pound gorilla in the room."

He was right.

Traffic that would be generated by the project along Western Avenue, an already heavily congested thoroughfare, is far and away the main topic of discussion. The Ponte Vista market-rate homes would bring about 4,600 people to San Pedro.

The draft environmental impact report, however, concludes that the traffic woes can be successfully offset with a host of improvements: widening Western in front of the housing project, adding some designated turn lanes and — the big fix — synchronizing the traffic signals using a sophisticated computerized system that can adjust, in real time, the timing of red and green lights depending on existing traffic conditions.

Four more meetings are planned by the Ponte Vista Task Force, a group appointed by Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn to work with the developer on plans.

Despite the Ear's traffic findings, opponents are skeptical.

"I'm not a mathematician, but I do have a sense of smell and these numbers don't pass the smell test," said Steve Pingel after a presentation on traffic at the Thursday public meeting.

Frank Fasullo pointed to his experience of having two children who went through Christ Lutheran School, located on Western.

"My wife and I have sat in gridlock for eight years," he said.

"You don't live here and it's

safe to say you're not going to live here," Fasullo said, addressing Bisno. "... I really have no problem with what you want to build. My problem is getting out of town on Western."

While the study by a private consulting firm was paid for by the developer, city transportation officials said last week it appears to be in line with city formulas used for such reports.

"I've seen many developers come and go and what I've seen so far (in the EIR) is pretty encouraging," said Yadi Hashemi of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. "The developer seems to be willing to go all the way to mitigate the impacts."

Supporters, including many longtime San Pedro residents who are well known in the community, point to the need for more housing. According to the EIR, the building of Ponte Vista would provide only 25 percent of what planners say is needed in terms of additional housing stock.

"I was opposed to the project when it started," said Rachel Viramontes, who now serves on the Ponte Vista Advisory Board for senior housing. "The traffic is so bad now."

But seeing the drawings of the project and the numbers that say conditions will actually improve with the mitigation measures — most of which will be paid for by the developer — she changed her mind.

"I think traffic will be much better than it is now," she said.

Task force member Jerry Gaines said more explanation is needed on how the traffic num-

bers were reached in the report. For many residents, the figures appear to be too optimistic.

For example, a new "hybrid" alternative raised at last week's meeting indicated that building 1,700 units — with half of them senior housing — would nearly equal peak hour traffic numbers generated by building 429 single-family homes. "It wasn't articulated very clearly as to how these calculations are made by using the engineering source documents," Gaines said. "The (study's) credibility is not an issue with me, but it's the implementation.... How is this going to work, what's the timetable?"

"The community, he said, needs more assurance from officials that the needed work on the roads and signals will be completed before the project opens.

And entire plan could change radically should the Los Angeles Unified School District succeed in acquiring about 16 acres of the property in an eminent domain action to build a new public high school.

The Ponte Vista task force expects to make its recommendations around May 2007. More workshops and two public forums — Jan. 18 and March 8 — are planned in the months ahead.

Hashemi of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation urged the community and task force to cooperate in creating a final plan.

All development, he said, "is a headache. But if you mitigate it right and there's a right approach, everyone can benefit."