

L.A. delays Ponte Vista hearing

By Donna Littlejohn, Staff Writer
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A showdown next week before the Los Angeles Planning Commission over San Pedro's Ponte Vista housing proposal has been postponed, with city planners agreeing Monday to grant the developer's request for a 45-day extension.

A Ponte Vista spokeswoman said more time is needed to study the city Planning Department's Nov. 21 recommendation denying the project.

The issue, which was to be discussed Dec. 11, now will tentatively go before the commission on Feb. 12 at a meeting in downtown Los Angeles.

The City Council will have the final say on whether the project is approved.

"We feel that the staff report was (released) very late," said Bisno Development spokeswoman Elise Swanson. "The department had our specific plan for over two years, and we would like more time to evaluate the staff recommendation. We didn't feel we'd be adequately prepared for the Dec. 11 hearing."

Ponte Vista critics read the move as a sign of trouble within Bisno Development ranks.

"I think they're running incredibly scared," said Doug Epperhart of the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council. "I think they saw a freight train coming at them, and all they wanted to do was stop it."

"I don't know what more they can do or say at this point that is going to change anything."

John Dugan, deputy director of the Los Angeles Planning Department, said a request for more time to study a city recommendation is generally granted.

Swanson said the developers especially want to challenge the city staff's recommendation against clustering senior housing on the Western Avenue property.

Planners said the 61.5-acre property across from Green Hills Memorial Park was too isolated and not close enough to a transit center, a service many seniors would need.

"We've stated all along that we'd purchase a DASH shuttle bus for the Department of Transportation that would extend along Western Avenue to the Ponte Vista property, to provide a loop for shopping," Swanson said. "We also will provide a senior shuttle service, and we've discussed other possibilities with the MTA."

The project also would include some on-site retail services, she said, such as a dry cleaners, coffee shop and dentist office.

Epperhart said the delay will benefit opponents.

"Every time we go out and talk to people we get more people on our side," he said. "Now we have another month and a half to do that."

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn hopes developer Bob Bisno will be open to downsizing Ponte Vista.

"Hopefully, during this delay, Mr. Bisno will go back to the drawing board and come up with a new project that will work for this location and has a better chance of being approved," Hahn said in a written statement.

The staff recommendation found that the Ponte Vista proposal for 1,950 homes is inconsistent with the city's General Plan and suggested that no more than about 1,100 homes be built.

Bisno said that number would not be enough to support the amenities the developer has promised to fund.