

Ponte Vista plan heads for change

SAN PEDRO: Navy land developer may cut units to reduce traffic.

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Nearly two years after he unveiled plans to build 2,300 homes on surplus Navy land in San Pedro, developer Bob Bisno this week said he would unveil a reworked—and likely downsized—version of his Ponte Vista development next month.

The revised plan, expected to be released June 18, will address traffic concerns that have dominated the community debate, Bisno said.

Critics say the 2,300 condominiums currently proposed for Ponte Vista would cripple the already congested Western Avenue thoroughfare.

Bisno said he has listened to the comments and concluded: "Traffic is the 10,000-pound gorilla."

"We'll be looking at how to reduce traffic counts through a unit reduction" in the Ponte Vista plans and by possibly increasing the percentage of units restricted to homeowners 55 and older, Bisno said in an interview Wednesday.

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who has become increasingly critical of the development in the past few months, said the revised plan should have been presented months ago.

"He knew 2,300 units was dead on arrival when he first presented that to me," Hahn said. "For him to have spent all this time gathering signatures and sending postcards and dividing the community has been a total waste of time."

Bisno purchased the 61.5-acre surplus Navy housing land in 2005 for \$125 million.

His proposal to build a 2,300-home gated community has sparked sometimes heated debate, not to mention competing petition drives, blog sites and aggressive mailers.

The community divide also prompted Hahn to appoint a citizens advisory panel to study the plan and come up with recommendations in June. The panel has been meeting since last fall.

While the advisory group seems to be moving toward finishing its work, Chairman John Greenwood said the panel remains divided in its views of how much density should be allowed.

"It seems there are two major positions on the board," Greenwood said. "Some support R-1 (single-family homes) only, end of discussion. The rest of the committee, with the exception of maybe one or two, believes that the 2,300 number is way too high and that 1,700 is probably still going to be way high."

Panel member Jerry Gaines this week floated other possible scenarios, including traffic analyses. Included were various mixes of senior versus multiple-family homes totaling 429, 1,000, 1,200 and 1,600 dwellings.

The panel is expected to begin discussing various options at its next meeting June 7, with Bisno to release his alternative plan at the following meeting later that month.

Greenwood said the current number of homes is "not realistic. I expected him to come off of the 2,300 number a long time ago."

Hahn said she is awaiting the panel's recommendations before she makes a final decision.

But she also reiterated on Wednesday: "So far I have not been persuaded to change the zoning from R-1."

The associated traffic studies, in particular, "have been pretty sobering," she said.

Bisno needs a zone change from the city of Los Angeles to build more than the approximately 500 single-family homes the land currently is zoned to accommodate.

Meanwhile, the Central San Pedro Neighborhood Council on Monday voted to support a "residential development that optimizes the number of units, the variety of household types served and the affordability of housing."

"We support development based on a specific plan instead of the existing R-1 zoning," stated a resolution adopted by the council.

Few developments have caused as much debate as Ponte Vista, which backers say addresses key needs in the community for more market-rate housing and homes for active, empty-nester seniors

Bisno's current plan sets aside 575 homes—25 percent of the entire project—for homeowners 55 and older.

Bisno said that number could go up as a way to further reduce traffic impacts.

Other potential changes include adding more retail space for the wider community and placing only the senior housing section behind gates.

Bisno hopes to go before city planners with his request for a zone change in July.

Both Hahn and Greenwood are hopeful the advisory panel will wrap up its work within the next month or so.

"The process would have worked better if Bob had brought in his downsized plan sooner," Hahn said. "They were waiting for him to do that."