

Ponte Vista Site Still in Play

*Recent Story in Daily Breeze "Not Accurate," Says
LAUSD Official*

By Chris Yang, Staff Writer

An official with the Los Angeles Unified School District recently indicated that it has not declined to pursue land currently owned by a private real estate developer, directly contradicting a story in a local newspaper earlier this month. Rod Hamilton, a regional development manager with LAUSD's Facilities Services Division, recently confirmed that a story appearing in *the Daily Breeze* several days earlier was "not accurate."

According to the Oct. 6 report, LAUSD had "quietly shelved a plan for a public high school in San Pedro." It was, according to the story, looking instead to utilize land offered by the city of Lomita for the new high school.

But according to Hamilton, reached by phone on Oct. 11, the decision to find an alternative site for what is officially known as the "South Region High School 14" has not yet been made by the Board of Education.

"What's not accurate is that we've 'shelved' or 'tabled' the former naval housing site," said Hamilton. "Only the board, by their vote could do that."

In addition to calling into question the story filed by the *Breeze's* education reporter, Hamilton's comments highlight a very public disagreement between the agency's Facilities Services Division and one of its newly elected board members, which has yet to be fully played out.

Dr. Richard Vladovic, recently elected to the Board of Education with the strong support of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, campaigned publicly against the construction of a high school at the former Navy-housing site. His position found overwhelming support from the developer who currently owns the land, Bisno Development.

Bisno, who spoke out against a decision to designate his property as a "preferred site" in 2005, vehemently opposed any attempt by the agency to proceed with its plans.

Although the board's vote to designate the property as a "preferred site" was unanimous, opposition has come from a wide variety of constituents, including some of Bisno Development's staunchest critics. Opponents include the city of Rancho Palos Verdes, Councilwoman Janice Hahn, Western Avenue Task Force member Jerry Gaines, Mary Star of the Sea High School, and former school board member Angie Papadakis.

At least one individual with knowledge of the issue does not believe the developer's influence played a part in Lomita's reported willingness to accommodate a new high school within its city borders.

"I don't think so, at this point," said former board member Mike Lansing. "There's more than one official in Lomita that has to make that decision. It's a long way to go to see if it's a viable option."

Though he agrees that a different location would be preferable, Lansing effectively confirmed Hamilton's point that any decision to alter

its designation as a "preferred site" would require the board's approval.

"It's a decision of the Board of Education, whether or not to shelve a project," said Lansing. "My understanding is they'd have to take another vote to drop that site."

To date, that vote has not yet taken place.