

# Ponte Vista project gets thumbs-down

Draft report cites density and neighborhood 'scale' in planners' preliminary rejection.

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Los Angeles city planners late Friday denied the proposed 1,950-home Ponte Vista project in San Pedro, easily the most divisive issue in town since it was first proposed three years ago.

The much-anticipated recommendation came in a draft report that sidestepped a single reason for rejecting the residential community planned for former Navy housing land on Western Avenue.

However, the report did cite the project's density, lack of a transit center within walking distance and "the prevailing scale and character" of the neighborhood.

Developer Bob Bisno could not be reached for comment Friday night.

News of the findings was hailed among the project's opponents, who insist the property's zoning should not be changed from single-family residential, which would allow about 430 homes.

"I'm amazed and stunned," said Mark Wells, the local resident who launched a blog and petition drives to oppose Ponte Vista. "I think it's time for Bob to put his land into hibernation and wait for things to change."

Doug Epperhart of the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council called the decision "a grand-slam home run" for opponents of the 61-acre project.

The next move is up to Bisno. He could continue to pursue the project as proposed, asking the Planning Commission to overrule its staff recommendations. He could negotiate a compromise in the number of housing units. Or he could bow out altogether.

The project is scheduled to go before the city's Planning Commission on Dec. 11 and, at this point, Bisno is expected to follow through with the process.

Aside from project denial, planners floated some alternative unit numbers for the property, based on comparisons with the Gardens, a condominium project two miles north of the Ponte Vista site.

Based on density per acreage, planners said a possible alternative number of homes could be 775 to 886.

Tacking on to that a so-called density bonus - a formula by which the city will allow additional units in exchange for the developer setting aside a percentage of the housing

stock as "affordable" units - those numbers conceivably could then increase from 1,046 to 1,198.

But there is no guarantee a project with those numbers would necessarily be approved, either.

"We're still digesting the report, but we're deeply, deeply disappointed," Bisno spokeswoman Elise Swanson said late Friday. "But the staff report did not recommend a single-family home development (either)."

The numbers floated as alternatives, however, would not be enough to support the range of amenities planned for Ponte Vista, she said. It also would drive up the cost of the homes.

Ponte Vista supporter Louis Dominguez said the decision makes little sense in light of the city's expressed desire to provide more housing. With 44 percent of the Ponte Vista development set aside for senior citizens, Dominguez said the project offered a unique opportunity for residents wishing to downsize without having to leave San Pedro.

Reducing the number of homes, he said, works against keeping selling prices down and the promised developer-funded amenities in place.

"It just doesn't make any sense in today's market," Dominguez said. "I don't understand the thinking behind it. I thought they'd be a little more realistic."

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn said she hopes a smaller project can now be agreed upon.

"I have always felt that the proposed project of 1,950 units was just too big for this location in San Pedro," she said in a written statement. "I am still hopeful that we can see a smaller project that delivers good jobs, mixed income housing and fits better with this part of San Pedro."

Ponte Vista attracted both supporters and critics after Bisno first unveiled plans to the community in October 2005.

The opposition has been especially intense and well organized, with much of the criticism focused on building anything that would add to the congestion on Western Avenue, one of only two main thoroughfares leading in and out of San Pedro.

Bisno originally proposed 2,300 homes, and then cut that number to 1,950. A Bisno staffer suggested last month that they anticipated ultimately downsizing the project to perhaps 1,700 homes.

Citing two other Bisno projects that have run into trouble elsewhere in Southern California in recent weeks, Wells said, "I wouldn't be surprised if they were laying off their people today."

But Dominguez said he's confident the fight will continue.

"Unless I hear different, I'd expect we'll go forward (to the Planning Commission) and then go before the City Council to make our case," Dominguez said. "There are a lot of us who believe this is the right way to go."

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