

Protect San Pedro neighborhoods' R1 zoning

By Doug Epperhart

I intended to start this column by referring to the recently announced "R Neighborhoods Are 1" group as the cavalry riding to the rescue. Only it's more like circling the wagons.

If anyone is waiting for our elected leaders or their bureaucrat-sidekicks to save the day, forget it. "Sheriff" (Council-woman Janice) Hahn seems more concerned about trying to figure out how much money will satisfy the robbers so they'll move on to the next town.

As usual in this little outpost of the L.A. empire, San Pedrans are left to fend for themselves. Fortunately, the Northwest and Coastal San Pedro neighborhood councils are rounding up the troops and leading the fight for our future.

R Neighborhoods Are 1 began when a small group started circulating petitions to keep the current single-family (R1) zoning at the Ponte Vista site. The group is a true grassroots movement that has already gathered 4,000 signatures in favor of holding the line at R1.

If you haven't signed on to R1, consider the following.

Bisno Development proposes to place 2,300 condos at Ponte Vista and claims it will add only 9,200 cars a day on Western Avenue. They also say measures like traffic signal automation and a turnout lane alongside their property will make things better.

Project proponents also cite "smart growth" principles in advocating for 7,300 new residents at this location (a number offered by the developer in his original environmental documents). That yields a population density of about 120 people per acre for Ponte Vista, more than eight times higher than the regional average.

What's important is the correlation between population density and traffic volume. Studies indicate that doubling population density in an area increases traffic volume (vehicle miles per square mile) by about 80 percent. Furthermore, those vehicles move slower because of congestion. Slower traffic results in greater air pollution.

One more thing, areas with a good mix of freeways and arterial-street alternate routes are necessary to carry heavier traffic loads efficiently—something that does not exist in the area around the Ponte Vista site.

But, we need all these con-dos for the aging baby-boomers clogging our shuffleboard courts, right?

Nope.

Before the Bisno bandwagon rolled into town, I'd never heard anybody complaining about the lack of housing for seniors. I've been asking around and, so far, nobody can recall such a demand. In fact, respondents to Bisno's recent survey ranked senior housing very low on their list of priorities.

At public meetings, what I've heard from Ponte Vista's senior supporters is a demand that this project be built so they can "cash out" their home equity. I believe folks should be able to reap the rewards of a lifetime of hard work, but I have yet to see profit as a necessary component in any planning document.

Bisno's survey does shed light on the need for "affordable" housing. The only thing respondents wanted more than affordable housing was no housing at all.

Maybe you've encountered Bisno's paid petition crew at the market, asking for signatures supporting Ponte Vista. Their pitch tells people the project will provide affordable housing. This is hogwash. According to the developer's numbers, the average price of a Ponte Vista condo will be more than \$700,000.

Bisno himself will not use the term "affordable." It has a legal meaning and claiming that the project contains affordable units is fraud. If anyone asks you to sign a petition for affordable housing, just say no.

So what's the big deal about zoning?

It defines the character of a community. It determines what a place will be, now and in the future. It

decides whether it will be mostly a place where people own or rent, work or live, drive or walk. Most importantly, whether they want to stay there forever or can't wait to get out.

Los Angeles City Planning Director Gail Goldberg, speaking in San Pedro, said, "In every city in this country, the tone on the land establishes the value of the land."

In Los Angeles, that's not true. The value of the land is not based on what the zone says or what the plan says. It's based on what that developer believes he can change the zone to. That is disastrous for this city. Disastrous. Zoning has to mean something in this city."

Decades ago, people in San Pedro fought to save the character of this place when city planners pushed rezoning that resulted in overdevelopment. It's why there are neighborhoods in our town where single-family homes sit cheek-by-jowl with four-story apartment buildings on narrow side streets and nobody can find a place to park.

When I first moved here and got involved in community issues, I learned from the best. Karla Bittner, who led the Palisades Residents Association, told me the most important thing was to protect the neighborhood's R1 zoning. "It you lose that," she said, "you lose everything."

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