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## **Residents vocal over loss of McCowans**

By Doug Epperhart

San Pedro is a place where history doesn't just come alive; it is alive. Especially when some of that history is killed.

A crowd of about a hundred jammed the meeting of the Coastal neighborhood council last Monday to express their displeasure (I'm putting it mildly) about the loss of McCowans' last market.

A developer bought the property at 20th and Walker, spruced it up, and continued to sell groceries to the neighbors. At least for a while.

But, within six months, the out-of-town (an important point to Pedrans) buyer threw in the towel. The parking lot has already been demolished and the store is being torn down.

The three lots that held parking are zoned R-1 (single family) and will be expensive custom homes. No problem for the neighbors who live in the "sea of R-1 surrounding McCowans" as one person put it.

However, the market itself was on three lots zoned C-1 (commercial), which can automatically be converted to R-3 (multifamily). In this case, the developer is able to construct 18 units of apartments or condominiums.

Which, apparently, is his dream - and the neighbors' nightmare.

From young to old and in-between, speakers came to the microphone at the Coastal meeting and talked about what McCowans had meant to them and their family and their community.

"It was like family," said one. Referring to San Pedro, another said, "It's a family town." One told about working at the market when it was still a converted house. Another

explained that many of the older folks who don't drive walked to the store for their groceries.

"The downside was traffic," said one neighbor, "we put up with it because McCowans provided a service to our community."

The same obviously can't be said for a mini-Ponte Vista at the corner of 20th and Walker.

Neighborhood councils are about quality-of-life issues. They were created to represent the average Angeleno (and Pedran). These people, who aren't driven by the dollar and can't afford lobbyists and lawyers are, in essence, the councils' clients.

As one speaker so eloquently said, "Make the lifestyle a priority and not the money."

Believe me, we're trying.

But, as explained by City Councilwoman Janice Hahn's development and planning deputies, Gordon Teuber and Frank Hong, it all depends on the zoning.

In the case of McCowans, there's the possibility that something called a "Q condition" could be placed on the property to prevent multifamily use.

But, it's a process that takes time and involves a race with a developer who is moving quickly to get permits. It may be too late to save this corner of the neighborhood, but I know the Coastal council and Hahn will do their best.

There's a lesson here for all of us. The time to deal with the issues that arise from cases like this is now. The McCowans lots were downzoned 25 years ago, from C-2 to C-1. At that time, a condition should have been placed on this property that would have prevented the tragedy that's occurring now.

What about the other areas of San Pedro where C-zoned properties are surrounded by homes? Considering that we're in the midst of rewriting the San Pedro community plan, isn't it time to look at all those places and think about what the future may bring?

Later at this meeting, the council discussed the issue of a small lot subdivision at 33rd and Peck. For nearly a year, the neighbors there have been grappling with a developer who seeks to replace one home with five. Other developments boosting density in our neighborhoods are under way or in the planning stages.

Communities change. You can't stop it, but you can manage it. That's the lesson for residents and their neighborhood councils.

Get angry. Do your homework. Empower yourself. Make the politicians feel your pain. You will get results.

"Get up on your hind legs and howl" is how one speaker said it Monday night. Come on, what are you waiting for? The neighborhood you save may be your own.

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