

# San Pedro market moves out. Are condos moving in?

By Donna Littlejohn Staff Writer  
January 19, 2008

As the final remnants of McCowans Market in San Pedro were sold at auction and hauled away last week, residents in the quiet hillside neighborhood were mobilizing to battle what could come in its place: a 15- to 18-unit condominium complex.

"People are just shocked," Barbara Dragich said.

"Condos just don't belong in this neighborhood," said another neighbor Robert de Langre.

The condominiums are being eyed for the market parcel at 20th Street and Walker Avenue, although an alternative proposal could be for mixed-use, with commercial on the ground floor and 14 condominiums.

Across the street, on the old parking lot, plans are in the works to build nearly million-dollar single-family homes, with a banner already on the property announcing: "Coming soon! Custom Homes for Sale."

Michael Rosenthal, who bought the market in 2007, announced in December that he would have to close the store due to falling business and stiff competition with the area's large supermarkets.

A flier, touting the [www.20thstreetcustomhomes.com](http://www.20thstreetcustomhomes.com) Web site, states that the three homes - two on the parking lot across the street and a third in the parking area behind the store - will start at \$899,000 and that construction will be done by April, although it appears that approvals still aren't in place.

There is also a question about the zoning. The market property at 1932 S. Walker Ave. is zoned for commercial, but by law can be converted to a multiresidential use. However, a tract map approval would still be needed to build condominiums, according to city records.

The parking lot allows single-family homes but two-thirds of the parcel carries a parking designation, meaning only a parking garage would be permitted. A waiver would be needed to remove that restriction.

Rosenthal denied reports that he's the one pursuing the new development by way of transferring ownership of the property to a separate limited liability corporation still under his control. But Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn's office said they were not aware of any other owner.

"I am not involved in this at all," Rosenthal said. "I can just tell you that I have cooperated with the people who are going to be building so they can jump on this and get their permits."

Rudy Svorinich Jr., the area's former councilman who now runs a private consulting business, said Rosenthal and a partner met with him two weeks ago to discuss the plans.

"He came in with his partner and had a preliminary discussion with us about what they had in mind," said Svorinich, whose firm has not been hired to represent the development. "We told them to get some additional information and some drawings, so we're waiting for that second meeting, but it hasn't happened yet."

Rosenthal is still listed as the legal property owner, but he said that will change in a few days.

"I'm not part of (this)," he said. "I'm just helping them do what they have to do."

Demolition of the market building, constructed in 1956, is scheduled for the next couple of weeks, Rosenthal said.

Condominiums will likely face stiff opposition in the port town that has been hit with rising density.

"So many?" said one neighbor, Madeline Mosna, when told of the plans as she walked her dogs near the market on Friday morning. "That's too much. These are all small houses here."

Hahn is among those who has qualms.

"It would be sad to see a longtime community market torn down for condos," she said in a prepared statement. "It's a piece of San Pedro that we will never get back.

"I agree with the community. This is the wrong place for increased density in San Pedro."

Opponents say the project should be limited to single-family homes in order to preserve the character of the neighborhood with homes built in the 1920s and 1930s.

"This greedy developer wants to destroy what we've worked so hard to maintain," de Langre said, adding that condominiums would bring additional traffic and stress on the area's aging sewer system.

Rosenthal expressed frustration with the resistance.

"They have a right to build this thing," he said, adding that he understood there would be no zoning changes needed. "All these people around that neighborhood bought there knowing what it was zoned. Now they're going to get three beautiful custom homes with a small complex. They should have known that could happen."

He said there will be less traffic with condominiums than there was with the market, which saw 800 to 1,000 people a day along with large delivery trucks.

"If it's 18 units, big deal," he said. "You have 18 people coming home rather than 800 to 1,000 people coming. I just don't get it. These people should be thankful that this complex is coming. It will enhance the property values there, and that's the bottom line."

An industry auction was held Thursday morning to sell the display cases, cash registers and other fixtures in the market, which closed earlier this month.

Workers were dismantling and hauling out what was left on Friday morning, including shelves and check stands. An old Christmas wreath still hung on the wall near the meat section.

McCowans had a long history in San Pedro, with the first market opening at Summerland Avenue and Bandini Street in 1927. But in an era of giant warehouse stores and jumbo supermarkets featuring delis, bakeries and cut-rate coupon deals the family-owned markets are falling by the wayside.

McCowans got its start in the front room of John and Addie Mae McCowan's 400-square-foot house in the 1900 block of South Walker Avenue.

"People were disappointed, and I get that," Rosenthal said of the store's demise. "Some of these people, their grandparents shopped there. But I would have gone broke if I'd kept doing it."

Nadine McCowan, 89, lamented the changes that have swept away so many of the neighborhood markets.

"We were a small neighborhood market," said McCowan, who married McCowan's brother Adrian McCowan in 1940 and helped run the Summerland and Bandini store. "We dealt in service more than anything else. It was the place where neighbors congregated and visited. The clerks knew everyone by their first names. It was more of a personal relationship."

John Gill, who took a part-time night job stocking shelves for the 20th and Walker store from 1972 to 1976 to help save money to buy his first house, said times have changed.

"The big guys have just taken over," he said.

As for condominiums being proposed for the site, he said he'd rather see another market.

"But that's the trend," he said of the condominium plan. "Business is business. That's the way it is."

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## Neighbors speak out on the issue:

[#1](#)

Sunday Jan 20

"The big guys have just taken over," Gill said. As for condominiums being proposed for the site, "he said he'd rather see another market.'But that's the trend,' he said of the condominium plan.'Business is business. That's the way it is.'"

Yes, that's the way it is, because the people slept.

MMcK

[Los Angeles, CA](#)

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[#2](#)

Sunday Jan 20

This city has to get a backbone and tell these outsiders, and low life developers NO, we are swamped already with traffic and street parking, schools bursting at the seams and more soccer moms dropping off their kids. San Pedro will be another Marina del Rey sooner than you think.

Civic Minded

[Palos Verdes Peninsula, CA](#)

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[#6](#)

Sunday Jan 20

That you can use one example (EVLL) as an argument for Pedrans wanting someone to subsidize their desires for "free" only shows you are not a clear thinker. What Pedrans want is for developers to stay out and leave this small community alone - or, develop something that blends in with what is already here. Yes, the Target will come, people will adapt, change is inevitable. I've heard it all. But, that "those with the cash" (developers) to CRAM THEIR IDEA of what THEY WANT San Pedro to be like for THEIR PROFIT - is wrong - albeit allowed.

Polly Pedran

[Logan, IL](#)

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[#5](#)

Sunday Jan 20

It's obvious Rosenthal is trying to be a silent partner in the development; he never intended to successfully operate McCowan's. If the market were serving that number of people per day it would have sustained the business...quit BS-ing the community, Mr. Rosenthal.

Toni  
[Los Angeles, CA](#)

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[#7](#)

Sunday Jan 20

Obviously the developer who plans to put \$900,000 homes has their eyes closed. Homes are not even selling. Instead of three large monsters, why not look at the neighborhood. Craftmass style homes may be 4 or 5 total between the two lots. Maybe priced for those who can afford them \$500,000 to \$600,000. Condos do not belong in this area. Look at lower San Pedro, high rises that are not selling. I think Rosenthal knew what he was doing and is in on this or that mighty dollar.

Randell

[Los Angeles, CA](#)

[#8](#)

Sunday Jan 20

Crazy, San Pedro is so crowded already. What about all the condos sitting empty in other parts of the city? Pretty soon they will be trying to build condos all around the Korean Bell. At this rate they might as well close Friendship Park and put a few thousand condos up there too. What are these idiots thinking?

tony rodich

[La Quinta, CA](#)

[#9](#)

Sunday Jan 20

ROSENTHAL GOT HIS BIG TAX WRITEOFF NOW HE'LL MAKE BANK ON THE NEW DEVELOPMENT  
..... AND WHY THE HE\*\* DOES SIVORNICH NEED TO BE "CONSULTED" ????? HAASN'T HE "RAPED"  
SAN PEDRO ENOUGH ALREADY WITH HIS "CONSULTING " FIRM ..... I.E. BISNO , OH WAIT , THAT  
KINDOF SORTOF FELL THROUGH ..... HOPE THIS DOES TOO !!!!!!!