

The Revenge of City Planning

In case you missed the news the last couple of days because you have been on a sail boat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean or climbing a mountain in Alaska, staff in the City of Los Angeles Planning Department recommended in their report to the Planning Commission that the creation of a specific plan that would allow 1,950 homes and 10,00SF of commercial space to be built on 61.5 acres of former Navy Housing along Western Avenue be rejected. City Planning has summarily denied and disagreed with the proposed specific plan for the Ponte Vista development at every level from the land use and density to the design. Not only did the planners reject the number of units (they suggested 1,046 to 1,196 with a density bonus instead of the developers proposed 1,950) they also questioned the idea to put a large number of senior housing so far away from essential services.

In other words, it looks like the developer of the Ponte Vista Project, Bob Bisno is going back to the drawing board.

Why is this the “Revenge of City Planning”? How many city’s are there in this country whose history and current political environment are so tightly entangled with the back room deals of real estate developers? It is a history and culture that permeates city hall and city politics to this day. From the boosterism of the turn of the last century to post war developers and politicians who turned orange fields into housing tracts in the San Fernando Valley. Planning and zoning codes in this City have been little more than suggestions or recommended guidelines.

City of LA’s Planning Director, Gail Goldberg, who stated at a neighborhood council-sponsored forum in San Pedro in November, 2006, said:

“In every city in this country, the zone 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.”

The Planners appear to have reasserted themselves against the power and money of the developer in the case of Ponte Vista, but it wasn’t without the encouragement and hard work of the well organized and tenacious local opposition groups such as [R neighborhoods R1](#). These groups effectively utilized the internet and blogs to organize, pressure Council District 15’s office, and publicize their positions on the negative impacts of this housing development.

The hydra-headed monster that Bisno Development faces in addition to local community opposition, Planning Department opposition, also includes market conditions which do not appear to support the original pro forma for the project. How much will a housing unit need to be sold for when Bisno paid 122 million for the property? We are left [pondering](#) the next move on the part of Bisno Development.

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