

# What does R1 really mean? It's not quite that simple

By Doug Epperhart

By now, I'm sure everyone from Cabrillo Beach to the 405 Freeway has seen an R1 yard sign. You've probably been asked to sign a petition, too. At the very least, you've read or heard about the proposed Ponte Vista project on Western Avenue.

R Neighborhoods Are 1 has gathered nearly 10,000 signatures. The grass-roots effort is aimed at preserving the R1 (single-family) zoning currently in force at the 61.5-acre site.

The developer says he wants to build 1,950 condos. However, his draft environmental report still calls for 2,300 units. The same document presents 429 detached single-family as one possibility. (California environmental law requires that projects present various alternatives, including a "no-build" option.)

Suppose R1 zoning is maintained at the Ponte Vista site. How many dwelling units would that actually allow? Thinking the answer would be simple, I spoke with an L.A. city planner who is familiar with this project. R1 zoning mandates one house on a 5,000-square-foot lot. (A lot of 50-by-100 feet is typical in older neighborhoods). So you take the number of square feet of the site and divide by 5,000. That yields about 535 units for Ponte Vista.

Wait a minute. What about streets and water features and stuff like that? Doesn't that use up some of the space? The answer is yes, but it's the number of units that's critical, not the lot size. In all likelihood, many of the houses would be on lots smaller than 5,000 square feet.

So 535 is the answer -- unless you take into account the density bonus.

Homebuilders in California are encouraged to provide residences for low- and moderate-income people. In a state where the price of a house is way beyond the means of anyone not making 10 or 20 times the minimum wage, government offers "density bonuses" as an incentive.

A developer is allowed to increase the total units by 35 percent if a certain number are sold at "affordable" prices. Ponte Vista's owner has said he has no intention of selling

units that meet the official criteria for low- or moderate-income buyers. But, in theory, taking advantage of the density bonus rules would allow another 187 units. Total: 722.

I pointed out to the planner that the lot size kept shrinking. He told me there could actually be some multifamily buildings within the project, even though the zoning remained R1.

You've got to love government. Where else does two plus two equal four -- or 5½?

## **Smart growth**

Density bonuses are a cornerstone of so-called "smart growth" policies.

Smart growth suggests that population be concentrated in more dense, urban cores providing abundant public transportation. People will ride the bus or train or at least carpool to work and walk to local shops. Essentially, the idea is to reverse post-World War II suburban sprawl.

"Sustainability" is the handmaiden of smart growth. Sustainability is the doctrine that communities will be more or less self-supporting. In other words, there will be enough jobs in a community for the people who live there.

These concepts are wonderful, but there is a complete disconnect between the ideal and the real, particularly in San Pedro.

Statistics compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau show that about 90 percent of residents in the area drive to work. Of that number, about two-thirds have a commute of 20 minutes or more.

Clearly, they're not working around the corner or even down the street.

San Pedro is a bedroom community and will be for a long time to come. I don't understand why some people who advocate sustainability also support massive residential development such as Ponte Vista. How does adding 5,000 more bedrooms help the worker/resident imbalance? Go figure.

**Doug Epperhart is a member of the Coastal San Pedro Neighborhood Council board. He writes a biweekly column for *More San Pedro*. He can be reached at [dougepperhart@cox.net](mailto:dougepperhart@cox.net).**

**USER COMMENTS ( 3 of 3 total )**

***"10,000 signatures meant everything"***

*I suggest Cathy Beauregard read the latest news on Ponte Vista and the CAC's rebuke of Bob Bisno's outrageous proposed development to see if people getting together can't make a difference. R Neighborhoods Are 1 is a coalition of NC's and homeowner groups that worked together to gather community support to maintain R-1 zoning at the site. It seems the yard signs, buttons, bumper stickers and petitions had their desired effect in this first battle. Now it is on to NC's citywide to garner support in opposing this mega-development. This is just the start of a citywide, and even county wide movement, to stop developers from trying to build projects that are definitely not in step with the character of communities and whose densities are little more than an excuse to line their own pockets with greater profits. By the way, Ms. Beauregard was seen wearing a Ponte Vista Supporter tag at the CAC meetings. Perhaps this is little more than sour grapes on her part.*

*- Just4fin*

*posted: Friday, July 27th at 10:14 AM*

***"Very Interesting Article Mr.Epperhart"***

*"Smart Growth" is a code phrase for "kiss the single family house on a large enough lot for a backyard, goodbye". You are fortunate to be able to enjoy that type of living, but the "environmentalists" and "urban planners" goal is to replace them with high density corridors as you related. Take a trip around the bend and visit Hermosa Beach; drive around the residential streets by the beach and you will see their vision of your towns future. Perhaps room could be found for a couple of baseball diamonds and a soccer field for the children to play on rather than a "Sports Complex" which sounds like something the City of LA would have to spend a lot of money to maintain; they would rather build something like that...downtown.*

*- Jack Scribe*

*posted: Wednesday, July 25th at 16:40 PM*

***"10,000 Signatures means nothing"***

*So you gathered 10,000 signatures, the Youth Coalition gathered the same to show the desire and need for a Sports Complex on 22nd street and it fell upon deaf ears. We were told that is not enough to show the Politicians or Community Leaders that the Sports Complex was a desire or a need. (We provide research on the number of poor people it would serve and the good it would do for future generations) So the R-1 have gathered 10,00 signatures, so what in a town of over 86,000 that means nothing!!! My two sense on working together, No one in this town works together. Each committee or group work seperate of the other and want it that way!!!No one is ever willing to meet someone half way to make something happen in this town! Over 6 years of community groups and service have shown me no one is willing to work with the other, sure you may say it but actions speak louder than words*

*- Cathy Beauregard*

*posted: Saturday, July 21st at 8:53 AM*