

## City staff shifts, will urge EIR on Ponto plan

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### Recommendation altered after opponents speak

**By Michael Burge**  
STAFF WRITER

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CARLSBAD – Opponents of a proposed "vision plan" for Ponto appear to have scored a victory by forcing city staff to recommend an environmental impact report on the beachfront development proposal.

City staff had previously prepared a lesser environmental analysis, called a "mitigated negative declaration," on 50 developable acres in Ponto, the last large swath of undeveloped beachfront property in Carlsbad, just north of Batiquitos Lagoon.

The staff had recommended on June 28 that the council adopt that analysis, but after two dozen people spoke against the plan at the hearing, attended by about 200 people, the council put off its decision.

"Staff is now recommending that the City Council not adopt the proposed mitigated negative declaration as previously recommended by staff and the Planning Commission and that the preparation of an EIR be required," a staff report prepared for Tuesday's City Council says.

Vision plan opponents established a Web site calling for an environmental impact report, and the city received scores of e-mails calling for a full report. At least two attorneys submitted letters arguing for a full report.

"Because of the challenges raised, CEQA (the California Environmental Quality Act) requires that you do an EIR to address those issues," city spokeswoman Denise Vedder said yesterday.

Todd Cardiff, chairman of the Surfrider Foundation San Diego Chapter and one of those who called for an environmental impact report, said the reversal showed that the public can make a difference.

"I think if the public didn't show a strong showing this would have slipped under the radar and be approved," Cardiff said yesterday.

The proposed plan is intended to serve as a guideline for development of a portion of the land that lies between Carlsbad Boulevard and the railroad tracks, and between the Batiquitos Lagoon and the top of Ponto Drive.

The city says the area includes 8 acres of residences and light industry and 42 acres of vacant lots.

The plan envisions but does not require a 400-room resort hotel, a 150-room hotel and a third hotel that would have 110 rooms and 50 time-share units. It also would include condominiums, apartments, restaurants, offices and shops, and calls for trails, a pedestrian underpass beneath Carlsbad Boulevard and a wetland interpretive park.

The Surfrider Foundation's Cardiff said he expects the council to agree to an environmental impact report.

"I had faith that this was going to require an EIR and the City Council would realize that," he said.

Cardiff said opening up the EIR process also opens the door to possible plan changes.

"One of the things that's required under CEQA is to look at alternatives," he said. "At the end of this process the city will improve on their vision plan."

He noted that one of the things sought by many plan opponents was to preserve the land as open space.

But nearly all the land covered by the plan is privately owned and zoned commercial or residential.

The staff report notes that an environmental impact report, which would probably include separate studies on traffic, plants, wildlife, water and air quality and noise, may cost \$150,000 to \$200,000. It asks for council guidance on how to pay that cost.

Such studies take nine months to two years to complete, depending on their complexity.

The staff report also notes that the council can reject the vision plan and allow developers to perform their own environmental impact reports on their individual projects.

Tuesday's council meeting begins at 6 p.m. at City Hall, 1200 Carlsbad Village Drive.

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■Michael Burge: (760) 476-8230; [michael.burge@uniontrib.com](mailto:michael.burge@uniontrib.com)

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