

2 smaller SP high schools are proposed in place of 1

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Los Angeles school officials have backed off their original plan to build a new, 2,000-plus-seat high school in San Pedro to relieve school overcrowding.

Instead, officials this week proposed constructing two smaller schools at opposite ends of town -- an 800-seat school on the Ponte Vista property on Western Avenue on the north and a 1,200-seat high school on school district property at Angels Gate Park to the south.

"We think this makes sense," said school board Trustee Mike Lansing.

But the proposal could face stiff opposition from residents around Angels Gate Park, which today holds its first public meeting (from 10 a.m. to noon) on developing a new master plan for the site.

Rod Hamilton, the school district's south regional development manager, said the matter will go before the Board of Education next month, with a vote possibly on May 22.

The schools would be ready to open in 2012.

Developer Bob Bisno, who wants to build 2,300 condominium and town homes on the Ponte Vista project, could not be reached for comment Friday. He staunchly opposed the larger high school, which would require an eminent domain action on the part of the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Meanwhile, a court ruling handed down this week opens the way for the school district to enter the gated Ponte Vista property to do the soil testing needed for any potential new school.

The developer and school officials have been at odds over access to the 61.2-acre surplus Navy parcel since last year.

New Ponte Vista, Angels Gate plans

Under the new proposal unveiled at a meeting Thursday night at San Pedro High School, the school at Ponte Vista would be built on the northwest corner on 6 to 8 acres (as opposed to the 15-16 acres that would have been needed by the larger campus).

The Angels Gate school would be part of a complex of education facilities on about 28 acres of district-owned Angels Gate property where a continuation high school and marine mammal care and bird centers already operate.

"We can really do some innovative things," Lansing said.

The Ponte Vista campus, Lansing said, could be an academy-style school while the campus at Angels Gate could focus on marine science, he said.

The idea still needs to go through more study and refinement and likely

will receive criticism on how the extra traffic could impact Angels Gate Park at 3601 S. Gaffey St.

Reactions more favorable

But so far reviews seem more favorable than those for the original large campus at the Ponte Vista property on Western Avenue, a thoroughfare that already is clogged by heavy traffic.

"It was refreshing to go to a meeting and hear some new thinking," said Dan Dixon, a member of the Northwest San Pedro Neighborhood Council.

"Overall, I think it's a positive step in the right direction."

Doug Epperhart, president of the Coastal Neighborhood Council, said there is a need for one or more new high schools in San Pedro. But having three high schools in town, he said, could draw lines of division within the close-knit community.

"You'll now have three rival high schools and I have a feeling what you'd wind up with is the southern San Pedro high school (at Angels Gate) being the sort of the 'elite' school," Epperhart said.

Parking at Angels Gate also will be a challenge, he said.

Lansing said joint-use ideas are already being discussed, including one that could relieve some of the sports field crunch in San Pedro.

Los Angeles City Councilwoman Janice Hahn, who argued for establishing several 500-seat "academy"-style schools instead of one large high school, said the new proposal is a welcome change.

"The 2,000-seat campus is a thing of the past," she said. "All the latest studies show that kids do better in small learning communities. I think you're going in the right direction. You've heard us."

Lansing, however, said the schools need to be large enough to serve the district's diverse student population. A 500-seat academy, he said, is "too limiting."

Both candidates running for the school board seat Lansing is vacating as of July 1 -- Neal Kleiner and Richard Vladovic -- opposed the single, 2,000-seat school.

Kleiner has suggested that establishing a ninth-grade academy is the way to go. The single-grade academy is something the district is "looking at," Hamilton said.

"The thought intrigues me," said Dixon, adding that a schoolteacher he sat next to at the meeting told him it would serve to "nurture" youngsters as they transition from middle school to high school.

Joint recreational uses envisioned

Lansing said joint-use ideas are already being discussed, including one that could relieve some of the recreational space crunch in San Pedro.

Both Vladovic and Kleiner also support joint-use programs between the city and school district.

The new proposal could address issues such as finding replacement fields for Eastview Little League or establishing a swimming pool that could be used by the schools and public alike, Dixon said.

"There might be all sorts of opportunities for athletic joint ventures or

joint uses of property," he said.

Can anyone say Eastview? I think people of good will need to consider that."

Lansing, however, cautioned that it won't solve all of San Pedro's recreation challenges.

"This is not the solution for Eastview," he said of the youth baseball program that's being displaced by a new Target store at Gaffey Street and Capitol Drive. "The city needs to come up with a plan. ... Eastview needs to have its own land."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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