

I had a dream...

Last night I had a vivid Technicolor dream that I was exploring this amazing new place, a city nestled in a landscape that took my breath away at every turn. There was water in every view, with naturally sculpted hillsides with such variety that created panoramic vistas everywhere you went.

Sound familiar? While some parts were not the Pacifica we know today – for example, a magnificent undulating building in the center of town that reflected the landscape around it. Designed in concert with nature, it was a beautiful symphony, where the structure helped you appreciate the city and its magnificent setting in new ways; perhaps an inspiration for our new city center?

As I looked out a vast window, my friend and I noticed strange animals that did not appear to belong in this perfect place. We soon realized that these distressed creatures had been displaced by the construction and had lost their habitat. Somehow, we were to become the characters in an old legend, the superheroes in fact, destined to fight to preserve this amazing place, as even with the best intentions, humans have caused suffering and harm to nature. My husband Bob woke me up then, darn it, just as I was ready to don my cape! (I know, Edna, no capes...)

What in the world does this have to do with my real life and with Pacifica, you might ask? Actually, a lot. Bob and I, both architects, moved to Pacifica last year, into a very sustainable home that we designed and built for our family. We spent many years exploring Pacifica's natural wonders before being lucky enough to find this rare vacant lot with ocean views. We love it here and are so grateful to be part of this community. The ocean, the mountains and landscapes, the hikes in nature, and the abundance of life that we keep discovering each time we go out, have made this time of pandemic bearable.

Not unlike the superheroes in my dream, we are currently fighting a very ill-conceived development of eight condominiums called Vista Mar, just up the hill from us on Monterey Road. It's a very steep site, 52 percent average slope, with many mature trees, including heritage Monterey pines. The site connects existing greenbelts as part of a wildlife corridor extension of Milagra Ridge, and there is a natural seasonal wetland at the base, where the water funnels from the watershed above. According to the immediate neighbors, the site is a haven for birds, as well as deer and other wildlife raising their young. Real estate speculator John Kontrabecki and his engineer Javier Chaverria have designed a project that obliterates 57 trees, seven of them heritage, and paves over the wetland, that moves more than 6,500 cubic yards of soil, hauling away more than 3,000 yards, to create building pads and a long steep driveway to the top. There are more retaining walls than you can count, some 25 feet tall. The project as designed would tower over the existing neighborhood, one corner rising 58 feet above the road between the proposed added soil and building construction. The drainage and erosion concerns, in an area where the existing city infrastructure is already so woefully inadequate, are terrifying.

As an architect who often works with developers, I am not a NIMBY (not in my backyard), opposed to all development on the site, but I am an environmentalist who believes in climate change and that humans are the main cause of the growing environmental problems we face. I believe we are entrusted with stewardship of our earth in our time here, and that our planet cannot sustain this kind of wholesale destruction to create a few expensive homes and one affordable housing unit. Pacifica's own Housing Plan says:

*“[D]ensities on inland sloping properties may be affected where geologic studies indicate that the revenue produced by locating units to achieve maximum densities does not justify the cost of providing engineering solutions sufficient to achieve those densities. In these cases, hazard avoidance may be the only acceptable mitigation...”*

Yes, we can all agree that there is a major housing crisis in the Bay Area, both in terms of quantity and affordability. But this project, with its environmental destruction and geologic risks, is not the direction the city should be pursuing to meet these housing needs.

In the process of fighting this development, I have had the pleasure of meeting many other like-minded neighbors. While we have not met in person due to COVID, our weekly planning meetings over Zoom have created an amazing community. Our individual talents, knowledge, experience, and time, along with the help of other technical consultants we have hired, have helped further expose some of the deficiencies of the project as designed. While the project is still moving through the planning review process, it has recently been delayed to the October 5 Planning Commission hearing. We urge you to join us in donning capes to protect our local resources and help the Pacifica Planning Department work on its updates to the General Plan and Municipal Code to improve the city's goals and processes as it considers smart growth for the future.

For more information on how you can help, I've included some links below.

- To assist with review of the Pacifica General Plan and other updates, see <https://www.planpacific.org/>
- For drawings, or more information about the Vista Mar Project, or to write letters, please reach out to city planner Bonny O'Connor at [o'connorb@ci.pacificaca.us](mailto:o'connorb@ci.pacificaca.us)
- Images of the Vista Mar site and 3D renderings can be found on this real estate website to sell Vista Mar as a development project before construction. <https://vistamarpacificacom/#!/>
- To join concerned neighbors in reviewing this project as it moves forward in the planning process, email [VistaMarPreservationAlliance@gmail.com](mailto:VistaMarPreservationAlliance@gmail.com)

The next Planning Commission hearing for the project is currently scheduled for Monday, October 5.

**CHRISTINE BOLES**