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CARLOS CHAVEZ Los Angeles Times

ADVOCATE: Barbara Burnett is among the Port Hueneme residents who are urging the California Coastal Commission to allow a zoning change for a 150-home project just south of Hueneme Road.

Residents to Lobby for Homes Project

A hundred from Port Hueneme will tell a state agency that they want housing, not industry.

By CATHERINE SAILLANT
Times Staff Writer

Barbara Burnett and a hundred of her Port Hueneme neighbors plan to rise at dawn today and board a bus for a two-hour trip to San Pedro.

Their mission: to demand that a developer be allowed to build 150 homes in their little slice of paradise along Ventura County's coast.

In an act as rare as the endangered sea birds that visit local beaches, residents want the California Coastal Commission to know that they support more housing for their community. Burnett, 69, fled traffic-

choked Los Angeles for a more peaceful retirement a few years back. She knows that a new subdivision will inevitably bring more cars and people.

But it's the best option for a 17-acre coastal plot that has been the focus of an intense battle among developers, residents and a nearby port district, she said.

"We're hoping that the Coastal Commission will see that our city has very little space for homes and we do need them," she said.

Supporters are being bused to the Coastal Commission's hearing by John Laing Homes of Newport Beach, the project's developer.

Laing Homes hopes it is nearing the end of a 3-year effort to gain community support and needed approvals to build a mix of single-family homes, town homes and affordable housing just south of Hueneme Road.

After the Port Hueneme City Council approved the project in February 2005, a battle for control of the property erupted between the developer and the Oxnard Harbor District.

District commissioners, who govern the nearby Port of Hueneme, wanted to use the land as storage lots for the luxury automobiles that roll off ships, and they were prepared to use eminent domain powers to make it happen.

But John Laing Homes rallied residents to fight for the housing development. After several fiery public hearings, the district commissioners announced last month they were rescinding plans to acquire the coastal lot.

That leaves the project with one major hurdle: gaining the Coastal Commission's approval. With commission staff recom-

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Residents Back Port Hueneme Project

[Coast, from Page B1]

mending against it, residents hope a show of support will persuade the governing panel to vote otherwise.

“John Laing Homes is going to give us affordable homes and a park,” Burnett said. “We feel strongly that this is the best thing for our town.”

Coastal Commission analysts said their recommendation to deny a land-use change is based on the 1976 Coastal Act. That law ranks industrial uses higher than residential uses for property in a coastal zone, said James Johnson, an analyst based in Ventura.

The intent is to accommodate commercial interests near an existing harbor to prevent development of another port, which could be more damaging to ecosystems, Johnson said.

Though the Oxnard Harbor District has bowed out, other interests, including commercial fishing, offshore oil development and desalination facilities, may still be needed in the future, he said.

Casey Beyer, director of community development for John Laing Homes, said it wasn't hard to get 100 people to sign up for the bus trip to San Pedro. If the Coastal Commission does not agree to change the zoning to residential, another industrial development could emerge to replace the Harbor District's proposal, he said.

“They understand that if the Coastal Commission denied the zoning change, the property could be used or subjected to in-



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BATTLEGROUND: State Coastal Commission staff say the land should remain zoned for industrial uses, but some residents say they would rather see homes built on the 17-acre site.

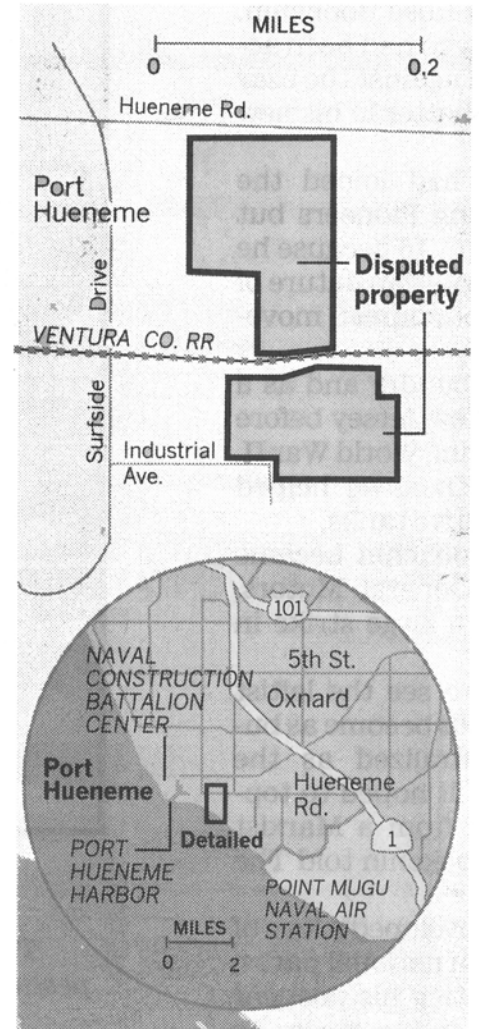
dustrial uses in the future,” he said. “Essentially, they'd rather see homes with families than industrial.”

With 22,000 residents squeezed onto 4.4 square miles, Port Hueneme has little room to grow. Its urban limits are bordered by the Naval Construction Battalion Center to the west, Oxnard to the north and east and the Pacific Ocean to the south.

The Laing project would make efficient use of the property, which is surrounded by light industrial buildings, Beyer said. In addition to the homes, the developer would build a park dedicated to the local Chumash Indians.

Beyer said he understands that the commission must carefully balance competing interests. But he believes the project would be a clear benefit for the city.

“The Coastal Act allows changes based upon the needs of the community,” he said. “The commission can take a look at the overall view and see this is a plus.”



MATT MOODY Los Angeles Times

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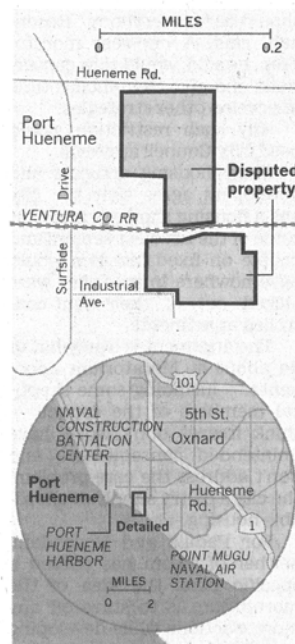
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