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Residents seek new consultant for Carlsbad's Ponto report

By: BARBARA HENRY - Staff Writer

CARLSBAD ---- South Carlsbad residents who are fighting development plans for the seaside region known as Ponto have mounted a campaign to get the city to dump the consultant it is using to produce an environmental report.

"What we want to see is the best process .... even if it costs a little bit more to produce the report," said attorney Todd Cardiff, who represents homeowners Michael and Peggy Crowley.



*Attorney Todd Cardiff, right, and his client Michael Crowley, a resident in the Ponto area, have concerns about the Ponto Beach development plans that would build on land overlooking the beach in south part of Carlsbad.*

**JAMIE SCOTT LYTTLE** Staff Photographer

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"A fair and objective process," added Michael Crowley as the two men stood on part of the undeveloped southern end of the Ponto region near Batiquitos Lagoon on Thursday.

That's exactly what they will get with the current consulting company, a city official responded.

"(RBF Consulting of Irvine) doesn't really have a financial interest in whether the 'Ponto Vision Plan' gets accepted or not," said Debbie Fountain, the city's Housing and Redevelopment Department director.

An employee with RBF Consulting said company officials could not comment because under their contract with Carlsbad all media questions must be referred to the city. Fountain said the consultants are just contractors who are paid for the work they've already done and not on whether the city ultimately decides to use the plans they produce.

Crowley, who lives in the nearby San Pacifica housing development, doesn't agree. He said his key reason for wanting the city to get rid of RBF Consulting of Irvine is because it is the same company that produced the Ponto plan ---- the city's extremely controversial, initial planning document for the 50-acre region.

That plan calls for allowing several hotels, as well as timeshare units and condominiums in the coastal region, which is bordered by Ponto Drive to the north and Batiquitos Lagoon to the south. In addition to producing that document, RBF Consulting also drafted what's termed a "mitigated negative declaration" ---- essentially a report stating that the Ponto plan didn't need a full-scale environmental report because individual developers would later produce their own environmental reports on their projects.

Both the Ponto plan and the negative environmental document have been the subject of several contentious city

meetings, and the City Council ordered the production of the full-scale, environmental report last summer because of the controversy.

The report, which is expected to be done in late 2007, is expected to cost \$230,555.

Crowley and Cardiff said they learned late last month that the city had hired the same consultant to do this job and they're not happy.

"There's no checks and balances here," Crowley said, arguing that the consulting company isn't likely now to produce an environmental report that doesn't support the plan it produced several years ago.

Fountain said Carlsbad officials completely disagree, noting that the company has already been paid for its work on the earlier document.

In addition, the people who work on this project probably won't be the same people who worked on the earlier effort, she added. The city's Ponto plan was a general planning document, while this environmental report requires extensive biological documents that likely will be farmed out to multiple subcontractors, she said.

Carlsbad received three bid proposals from companies seeking to do the new environmental report, Fountain said. Each company was reviewed by a team of city staff members to determine the its past experience and its capacity to do this project, she said.

"RBF was the one that came out with the top score ... they were the clear choice," she said.

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