

Group: P.R. leaders' inaction to blame for environmental decay

BY XAVIRA NEGGERS CRESCIONI

xneggers@sanjuanstarmedia.net
Of The STAR Staff

Puerto Rico could be a paradise if the administrations in power would just enforce the existing laws, Rogelio Figueroa, president of Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico, said Tuesday.

Government inaction enforcing laws, cronyism, and corruption are the main reason behind the decay of Puerto Rico's environment, Figueroa said at a news conference.

"The Planning Board is committing criminal acts," said Figueroa, who heads the movement to become a non-status based political party.

Planning Board President Angel David Rodríguez could not be reached for comment.

The government is 70 percent responsible for Puerto Rico's environmental decay, consumer habits account for 15 percent, while urban sprawl accounts for another 10 percent, said Figueroa.

"There would be more development and more work for construction if government would focus on developing urban centers instead of building urbanizations on agricul-

tural lands," Figueroa said.

There are about 150,000 abandoned houses and an equal number of abandoned lots in urban centers that could easily be redeveloped to meet the demand for housing, Figueroa said.

Urban sprawl over the past 25 years is the primary cause of decay in quality of life, he said.

"We're not against development. We just want it to be planned," Figueroa said, adding both the New Progressive Party and the Popular Democratic Party "pretend to plan but then they do the contrary."

PRPR is not yet an official political party because it lacks 100,000 signatures, but Figueroa said he is sure the group will make a difference in the upcoming elections.

The group has a candidate for Rincón mayor — realtor and surfer Carlos Gastón — who Figueroa said he is sure will win. The group will also run a candidate for the mayor of Ceiba.

"Rincón is a very forward thinking town on environmental issues. This is a good jumping off point for us, as is Ceiba because the lands

from Roosevelt Roads will be under threat of [rampant] development," Figueroa said.

"We want to break the monopoly the three existing parties have over politics in Puerto Rico," said Figueroa, a chemical engineer who grew up in poverty in Ceiba. "Having more parties will force the existing ones to form coalitions to get legislation passed which will make them have to answer more to the people."

Figueroa said that as a community and environmental activist he saw "that politicians prevented us from achieving what was needed."

To date, the group has 5,000 signatures toward its registration as an official political party, Figueroa said.

But, even if the group does not meet the 100,000 signatures required by the May deadline to inscribe as a political party, PRPR will tell its supporters to do write in votes for candidacies.

"If we get enough write in votes, the elections can help us register as an official party," Figueroa said.

"We know this is a long-term project,"



STAR PHOTO BY MAURICIO PASCUAL

Puerto Ricans for Puerto Rico President Rogelio Figueroa tells the press Tuesday that government inaction and bad faith is responsible for 70 percent of the decay of the environment.

Figueroa said. "Before I was an entrepreneur and I made enough money to be at this for a long time."