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New Collier EOC moves ahead, but with cost concerns

By Larry Hannan

Tuesday, April 24, 2007

Nothing ever comes easy for the Collier Emergency Management Department when it comes to the construction of a new Emergency Operations Center on Lely Cultural Parkway.

Collier County commissioners unanimously agreed today to a construction contract with Kraft Construction to build the new EOC on Lely Cultural Parkway. But the commissioners refused to provide all the requested funding for the project.

The commissioners approved \$30.5 million for the project. EOC personnel had negotiated a price of \$38.5 million for the project with Kraft, but commissioners refused to allocate the final \$8 million.

Citing concerns about the cost of the project, commissioners authorized the county Productivity Committee to look at the project and report back on whether any money could be shaved from it.

The Productivity Committee will report back to the commissioners, who then will decide how much of the other \$8 million will go to the project.

Commissioner Fred Coyle said holding back that \$8 million will not delay the project because most of the commission concerns involve items to be installed at the end of the project.

Large screen televisions and decorative gates were two of the concerns cited. The county is on schedule to try to get the new EOC built and operating before the 2009 hurricane season.

Until then, Collier emergency personnel will remain in a cramped 900-square-foot emergency operations center on the county's government complex at the intersection of U.S. 41 East and Airport-Pulling Road.

The new EOC will be between Edison College and Lely Elementary School. It will be a 90- to 100-foot building with a 185-foot communication tower.

Between 8 and 10 feet of fill will be added to elevate the structure above sea level.

The center would be the county's headquarters during a hurricane and could withstand winds in a Category 4 or 5, the two most powerful classes of storms. It also would have a Collier sheriff's substation, administrative offices for emergency medical services and a 911 dispatch center and backup offices for the information technology department.

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