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## Some residents speak out against plans to put EOC at Lely site

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Collier County commissioners will take input from the public into consideration before even one shovel goes into the ground for the construction of their new Emergency Operations Center on Lely Cultural Parkway, commissioners promised.

But not before \$91,000 is spent on adapting the building's plans to fit the new site, located between Edison College and Lely Elementary School.

The East Naples Civic Association sent a letter to commissioners last week, urging them to have a public meeting where residents could voice their concerns before officially selecting the Lely site. Commissioners did not honor their request, and voted Tuesday to move forward with the Lely site by a 4-1 vote with Commissioner Donna Fiala, who represents East Naples, dissenting.

The lack of attention to their request has some members of the East Naples Civic Association Board hopping mad.

"It's totally unfair that they've chosen this site before coming to the people first," said Elaine Schmidt, a board member. "We have had no say about what's happening in our community."

The EOC was scheduled for construction on Santa Barbara Boulevard until July, when residents of the Countryside subdivision, across from the proposed location, rallied against the site. County officials then turned their attention to the Lely location.

Civic Association Board member Ted Beisler said several meetings were conducted before the Santa Barbara site was chosen and ultimately scratched, and he can't understand why public input wasn't accepted prior to the Lely site selection.

Beisler thinks the 20 available acres on Lely Cultural Parkway provided an easy and quick solution for the county, because the land already belongs to them.

The county obtained the land as part of a settlement with developers in the area.

"We all know that we need an EOC just from looking at (Hurricane Katrina's) devastation," Beisler said. "They've been held off for a really long time, and they felt the need to rush to get into this site.

"I think that's a mistake."

The proposed EOC will be a 90-to-100-foot tall building with a 185-foot communication tower. It will be built to withstand the winds of a Category 4 or 5 hurricane, and would house a Collier sheriff's substation, administrative offices for emergency medical services, a 911 dispatch center and backup offices for information technology workers.

The main objection residents had to the Santa Barbara Boulevard site, which ultimately led commissioners to stray from it, was its proximity to neighborhoods. Beisler said he believes the Lely site will create the same problems.

"The building just seems out of place in a residential area," he said.

Beisler said residents probably will be able to see the tall building and communication tower, but after viewing the plans, Bob Murray, president of the Civic Association Board, said he feels the EOC complex will be well concealed by vegetation and required buffers.

"I'm in favor of it, because it's located in an area where it's not going to be visualized, except by those proximate to it," Murray said. "I think if they have to continue with this (deliberation), it's not going to be a good public service."

Commissioners voted Tuesday to pay the architectural firm of Harvard Jolly \$91,000 to revise their plans. The original plans for the EOC were conducive for the Santa Barbara site, and new plans would need to be drawn up for the Lely site.

Opponents like Beisler and Schmidt said they'd rather see the EOC constructed near the county landfill, off Collier Boulevard near Interstate 75, because it will provide easy access to the interstate, and it will not intrude on any neighborhoods.

Murray said whether it is housed on the Lely site or the landfill site is of little concern to him. He just wants the job done soon.

County Manager "Jim Mudd said he will make certain that people are allowed to voice their thoughts about the Lely site," Murray said. "If they fail, for some reason, and they were to have to go to the landfill site, they could probably fit the same design on that site, so they won't have wasted any money" redesigning it.

Schmidt said commissioners haven't heard the last of her and other opponents to the Lely site.

"We can always try to band together and get the community together to try and fight this," she said. "We've gotten together to fight other stuff, and I'm sure we'll keep going on this."

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