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New building will take 2 years to finish

By Larry Hannan

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Two more years.

That's how long it will take before Collier County gets a new Emergency Operations Center built and running on Lely Cultural Parkway between Edison College and Lely Elementary School.

In September county commissioners approved that site, where the county owns 20 acres, for the new emergency operations center.

Emergency management officials hope to have construction completed and all EOC personnel in the new building before the start of the 2008 hurricane season, Emergency Management Coordinator Jim von Rinteln said.

The commissioners still have to approve the construction plan for the Emergency Operations Center.

Ron Hovell, a Collier County project manager, said the county will ask the commissioners to approve the site-development plan over the summer with construction scheduled to begin in the fall.

They hope to break ground on the new building in October and finish construction in 20 to 24 months, von Rinteln said.

The cost of the project is still up in the air. Von Rinteln said the county is now figuring out the estimated cost and will establish a guaranteed maximum price for the contractor.

Commissioners will approve the guaranteed maximum prices when they approve the construction plan.

Hovell said the Emergency Operations Center will be a little bit more complex to build than the average structure because it is supposed to withstand a Category 5 hurricane. There will also be technological requirements in the building such as the need for computers and phone lines that can communicate during a storm.

The county's current 900-square-foot EOC is at the Collier County government complex. Emergency management officials complain it is too small.

The new EOC would 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.

Until July, county leaders had been intent on building the structure on Santa Barbara Boulevard. But opposition from residents of the Countryside subdivision, across the street from where the Emergency Operations Center was supposed to be located, led county officials to look at Lely Cultural Parkway as a new site.

The Lely site hasn't drawn opposition.

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