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Navy maps under review by county attorneys

By Alyson Matley amatley@keynoter.com
Posted-Wednesday, February 02, 2005

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Legal responsibility still unclear, says Conaway

County staffers still aren't sure what a new set of Navy maps means to development in the vicinity of the Key West Naval Air Station.

"The attorneys are looking at it now to determine the legal responsibility of the county," said Monroe County Planning Director Marlene Conaway.

New maps delineating sound and accident zones ringed around the Lower Keys base were delivered to county officials during a January Monroe County Planning Commission meeting, catching local officials by surprise.

According to Conaway, the new maps expand existing zones that surround the base, extending well into Rockland Key to the east and parts of Key West to the west.

The maps were brought up as the Key Haven Estates, Ltd group asked the planning commission for zoning changes on part of the 23 scarified and vacant acres at the mouth of Key Haven. The developers are asking that a portion of the property that is currently zoned commercial be changed to residential so that they can build an eventual total of 43 new single-family residences. The plans also include building ten homes on Enchanted Island, a spit of land just east of Key Haven.

The maps, though, may preclude the change, Conaway said. Ironically, areas within the high sound zones of the Navy maps are more conducive to commercial and even industrial development - a thought that does not please most Key Haven residents. A large number of Key Haven homeowners turned out for the January meeting supporting the developer's zoning request, hoping that homes instead of commercial development would fill those vacant lots.

"We're concerned, like everybody, about the impact of the noise on the people that would purchase the homes," Conaway said Monday. "The [Key Haven] rezoning is not in the high accident zone, but the island is in the accident zone. The rezoning section is in the noise zone."

Recent plans by the Toppino family to rezone part of Rockland Key - plans that have already been challenged by the Florida Department of Community Affairs - for affordable housing will also be adversely affected by the maps. Any new housing on Geiger Key or even Stock Island could be affected by the Navy noise zones, says Conaway.

The attorney's analysis should be completed later this week, in time for the Feb. 9 planning commission meeting, she said.

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