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By Alyson Matley amatley@keynoter.com
Posted-Friday, February 25, 2005

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But Nelson sees problems down the road

The Monroe County Commission on Wednesday gave the green light to the development of 43 high-end homes at the entrance to Key Haven in the Lower Keys, despite U.S. Navy maps that recommend against it.

But one commissioner worries the maps are going to prove more troublesome when it comes to redevelopment of Stock Island.

"Redevelopment on Stock Island is one of our big concerns," Commissioner Murray Nelson told the Keynoter. "And not just redevelopment, but workforce housing because the commission sees Stock Island as the ideal place for workforce housing in the Lower Keys."

On Feb. 11, the county Planning Commission approved the development proposed by Key Haven Estates Limited to eventually build 43 homes on a 20-acre tract that includes Enchanted Island, just east of Key Haven. In addition, the panel approved a zoning change for a portion of the property from commercial to residential.

Following the recommendation, the County Commission, in a special meeting Wednesday, unanimously approved both the zoning change and the overall development agreement.

The developer had been working toward approval for years. But in January, Navy officials stepped forward opposing it, citing their new maps that expand potential noise and accident zones to include the proposed development.

Monroe County Attorney Richard Collins advised the Planning Commission that until the maps could go through a lengthy public hearing process, the county is required to follow existing land development regulations based upon original Navy maps drawn up in the 1970s.

The expanded maps include a big chunk of the south side of Stock Island in a potential noise zone, a situation Nelson says may cause the county trouble in the near future.

The old maps brushed only the very tip of Stock Island near Peninsular Marina. The new zones take in a number of trailer parks. Even the new affordable housing complex of Meridian West is in the boundary.

"Because the Navy is doing this after the fact," Nelson said, "I don't agree that they have to fly that route and create that danger. If there is a danger, especially of accidents on Enchanted Island, the Navy should buy those development rights from the owner."

Capt. Jim Scholl, commander of Naval Air Station Key West, said the new maps are in keeping with new flight technology. He asked the County Commission to withhold its decision until the Navy could review potential conflicts.

"We certainly understand the precious nature of land and developable land in the Key West area," Scholl said. "However, there are potential conflicts when the military doesn't have the option to fully engage in the planning process."

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