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Navy needs help with good neighbor policy

Posted-Friday, January 14, 2005

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Surprise, surprise, surprise.

For TV viewers old enough to remember the character of Gomer Pyle on the Andy Griffith Show, it seems the only response appropriate in light of the Navy's recent actions with zoning maps.

Imagine how applicants from Key Haven felt when they took their proposed rezoning request before the Monroe County Planning Commission earlier this week.

After years of staring at a gravel lot and community eyesore, just about everyone was in agreement that changing the zoning from commercial use to residential was a godsend.

That is until the Navy stepped up to the microphone and officially opposed the rezoning application.

Citing maps that show an expanded impact zone from over-flights at Boca Chica, the government spokesman said the Navy opposed any housing development for the area.

The Planning Commission, caught somewhat flat-footed, opted to continue the public hearing until their February meeting. And the mad scramble in the background was mostly an exercise in face-saving that didn't quite work.

County Administrator Tom Willi, interviewed the next day on U.S. 1 Radio, was still sounding shocked at the Navy's surprise from left field. At that point, he hadn't heard about or seen the new Navy maps.

And, worse, no one in the county planning department or growth management division was even aware the bombshell was coming.

Now it's interesting in reading all the comments and pronouncements that have followed in the wake of this.

Chief among many questions that have emerged is what force of law the Navy's maps really have?

Jim Brooks, public affairs officer for the Naval Air Station, said the Navy lacks the power to force the county to adhere to the maps. But the maps are incorporated into the county's comprehensive land-use plan, so now what happens?

All this creates so many legal loopholes we anticipate a whole lot of legal fees being tallied as various parties maneuver through the minefields.

When it's all said and done, the county is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, because the Navy provides a sizeable economic engine and pilot training is important to national defense.

Over-flights are directly linked to the type of missions being flown. And the more missions, the bigger the economic boon the Navy brings to the Lower Keys.

So all parties in this want to adhere to the good neighbor policy.

Which raises this question: Why did the Navy spend two years working on these maps and not mention it to any of the public officials that are now left to clean up the mess?

Makes us want to quote Gomer again: Shazam!

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