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CURRENT NEWS



Key Haven project still waits on word of Navy map impact

BY LAURIE KARNATZ

Citizen Staff

The fate of a proposed 43-unit housing project at the entrance to Key Haven remains uncertain just days before a key meeting on the project, as county officials awaited word from legal counsel.

Discussion and possible action on the project was halted Jan. 11 after an official from Naval Air Station Key West, speaking to the Monroe County Planning Commission, said the proposal was incompatible with air station operations.

The revelation stunned the developers, their planning consultant and county staff, who were unaware that the Navy had expanded the boundaries of the Air Installations Compatible Use Zone, also known as AICUZ, for Naval Air Station Key West.

The AICUZ, in use at military bases across the nation, is designed to ensure the safety of residents and base operations by limiting certain uses in areas deemed at risk for accidents or high noise. Local governments are not required by the Department of Defense to abide by AICUZ, but are strongly encouraged to do so.

A 1977 AICUZ has been part of county land-use rules for years. It has hampered development on Rockland Key, Geiger Key and parts of Big Coppitt Key, but did not extend to Key Haven.

The new AICUZ, developed by for the base over the past several years, extends the boundaries westward, taking in the southern half of Key Haven, including the proposed residential development, and much of Stock Island.

Key West planning consultant Don Craig, who represents the owners of the Key Haven property, said he does not believe the project is subject to the recommendations of the new AICUZ.

Tue, Feb 8, 2005

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In a Wednesday letter to County Planning Director Marlene Conaway, Craig wrote, "In no way do we acknowledge or believe that the county can apply a document, map or regulation prospectively that has not had an iota of public scrutiny via required public hearings on its merits or applicability."

"...Until such time as the county amends its [land-use rules] ... the only AICUZ analysis map is that of 1977, which was properly reviewed analyzed and adopted according to local and state laws."

Craig and the owners of the Key Haven property plan to continue moving forward with the project, which is scheduled to be discussed by the Planning Commission when it meets at 10 a.m. Wednesday at the Marathon Government Center.

The Key Haven project, according to county records a "partnership" of Wayne Lujan and Ed Swift, has received overwhelming support from Key Haven residents, most of whom prefer residential to commercial development on the site. The project also appeared to receive cautious support — with caveats — from county planners before hearing of the Navy's opposition.

The project calls for building 43 homes and 10,000 square feet of commercial space on approximately 23 acres at the southern and eastern tip of Key Haven, including the spit of land called Enchanted Island.

The developer is asking to bypass the county's rate-of-growth ordinance and be awarded building permits "in exchange for upgrading" Key Haven's sewage treatment plant to advanced treatment standards by 2006. State law already requires the sewage treatment plant to be upgraded by 2010.

County staff has already recommended against that portion of the request. Outside of the permit issues, much of the project appeared viable, according to county records.

County Planning Director Marlene Conaway on Thursday said her staff has so far been unable to determine what effect the new AICUZ will have on the project. It's possible the project, which Lujan has been working on for two years, will be considered in-the-pipeline, thus removing it from the constraints of the new AICUZ.

There's also the possibility that the county won't adopt the new maps as part of its land-use plan, though current language in the plan indicates that updated Navy maps are automatically included.

Swift, who says he has no ownership in the Key Haven project except the possible gift of a lot if it goes through, questioned the benefit to the Navy of limiting new residential construction in areas already heavily populated.

"I think there are questions that have to be asked," said Swift.

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If the Navy's AICUZ ultimately causes a prohibition on the proposed development, Swift suggested that "somebody is eventually going to have to pay for" Mr. Lujan's land.

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Published on Sunday, February 6, 2005

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