

Farm worker housing proposed

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Published May 5, 2006

RUSKIN: A company that builds housing for farm workers is ready to expand operations. Little Manatee Housing Corp. is asking for a special-use permit that would allow 27 three-bedroom townhomes for farm workers on the northwest corner of Ninth Street SE and 10th Avenue SE.

"You'll think you have walked into a Lennar Homes subdivision," said attorney Mark Bentley, who represents Little Manatee Housing Corp.

The first phase of Manatee Village offers a mix of apartment and dormitory-style housing on the southeast corner of the same intersection. In applying for the permit, Little Manatee announced that its leaders wanted to build "safe, decent and affordable" rental housing that would be limited to farm workers and their dependents and would fall within agricultural zoning requirements.

The 4.5-acre site is now vacant and contains an environmentally sensitive spot on its western side.

The location lies near at least eight farms, the closest about a mile away. Residents would have a library, computer lab and car care area at their disposal, plus a recreation area and multipurpose space.

The proposed rental units have stirred discussion among Ruskin residents who have supported or opposed other recent zoning issues.

"We don't want it to become a situation where there is a lot of cookie cutter, low-income housing," said Anita Jimenez, 51. "At the same time, you want there to be housing for low-income people."

Builders of affordable housing for farm workers are eligible to apply for subsidies from the county and state government.

Bentley, the developer's attorney, will meet with interested neighbors at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at Manatee Village Community Center at 1016 Sawgrass Lakeway, on the southeast corner of Ninth Street SE and 10th Avenue SE.
PETITION 06-1075

RUSKIN: Plans for a housing development on a property facing the Little Manatee River have been ditched for now. SWW Inc. originally sought to build 25 houses on 16 acres southwest of Seventh Street SW and 24th Avenue SW. The developer needed a zoning change from agricultural to a planned development.

Though the Planning Commission and a zoning hearing master both recommended the project, residents logged 350 letters in opposition. Before the County Commission on April 25, neighbors argued that riverfront land would not be safe in a coastal high hazard zone. They also said at least 15 gopher tortoises on the property would be endangered by a development.

Commissioners sided with opponents by a 5-2 vote. Commissioners Ken Hagan and Mark Sharpe voted to back the rezoning. (PETITION 05-0645)

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