

# Collier commissioners approve new WCI project in North Naples



Collier County commissioners have given the green light to zoning and land use changes that will allow WCI Communities to build a new single-family community in North Naples.

The vote on the requested changes was swift and unanimous Tuesday.

WCI plans to build 66 single-family homes on a little more than 43 acres north of Vanderbilt Beach Road and east of Livingston Road.

After hearing a short presentation from the developer's representative and from only one neighbor who dislikes the project, County Commissioner Georgia Hiller moved to approve WCI's requests. Commissioner Tim Nance seconded her motion.

The project required a rezoning of agricultural land and changes to the Pelican Marsh planned unit development and its development order.

Neighboring residents were up in arms about the project when they first learned about it last year, but WCI made concessions that calmed the opposition. Residents in nearby Marsala formed a self-funded nonprofit organization, called Save the Preserves, and hired a local attorney to represent their interests.

At Tuesday's meeting, Naples land use attorney Rich Yovanovich, who represents WCI, shared some of the concessions the developer had made, including agreeing to put an additional buffer around the entrance road to minimize Marsala residents' view of cars going into the new community, to provide additional preserves near the south end of the property, and to build only single-story homes in the area most visible from Marsala and the Tiburon golf course.

Yovanovich assured commissioners that WCI's development would have no impact on the wildlife that the Tiburon golf course has attracted.

In July the county's planning panel voted unanimously to recommend approval of the project. Sitting as the Environmental Advisory Council, planning commissioners voted 4-1 for the requested changes.

County staff recommended approval.

Linda Joyce, one of the most vocal opponents of the project, told county commissioners she believed the development would hurt water flow and wildlife including eagles, ospreys, wood storks, fox squirrels and box turtles. She said it was wrong for WCI to repurpose a preserved area for an access road.

The road to the project would affect about 2 acres of the preserve.

Patrick White, the attorney for Save the Preserves, said his group had no objections to county approval of the proposed changes to the PUD or development of regional impact for Pelican Marsh, a massive development WCI built out years ago. Though the agreement with WCI didn't include the alignment of the new road, he said the project was brought to commissioners for approval with a "bow on it."

Neighbors wanted the entry road moved farther north, but that wasn't something the South Florida Water Management District would allow, so there was no point in trying to fight over it, White said after the county commission's vote.

Additionally, White said he's confident the developer will be able to get a left hand turn lane into the new community, which will help alleviate many of the traffic concerns of nearby residents.

Neighbors took the right approach, getting involved early so they didn't have to go to county commission chambers en masse to oppose the project, he said.

Once there's a final signoff from the county on WCI's requested changes, opponents will have 30 days to file an appeal.

Yovanovich said he was happy with how everything turned out.

"I think this is the way the process is supposed to work," he said. "If you work with neighbors and you resolve their issues, projects should get approved."