

Proposed Farm worker Housing explained at Bokeelia Civic Association

Providing accurate information is at the core of the principles of the Bokeelia Civic Association. With that in mind they invited the Development Team for Treeco Village, a proposed community of Farm worker Housing, to meet with the community, explain the project and answer the many questions that people have.

The meeting was held on Monday Oct. 12, 2007 at the Tropic Isles recreation building. Kami Corbett, a land use attorney from Foley & Lardner, representing the project presented the information along with Bowen Arnold and Rick Miller of National Development of America, LLC.

The proposed community would be 12.4 acres and would be built in two phases. The first phase consisting of 64 units of 2 and 3 bedroom units that range from 800 to 1,000 sq. ft.. If enough demand exists, then the balance of another 64 units would be built after another series of approvals.

Prior to any construction, there are many reviews of the proposal. First the community must obtain a Special Exemption from Lee County. A hearing is held in front of the Lee County Hearing Officer and that decision is final. County Commissioners will not vote on the project. Should that approval be obtained the housing project is then presented to the State of Florida to be considered for special financing in competition with many other housing projects throughout Florida.

The developer and builder National Development of America, LLC a 30 year Florida company, has built over 11,000 units or homes from Naples to Sarasota. Rick Miller described the project as having a Clubhouse, Passive and active recreation areas, a tot lot and a full time 24/7 on site manager. They have a similar community they built in Bonita Springs and upon completion it has received rave reviews from neighbors and visitors alike. "The key to having continued success with a community like this" Rick Miller a principal of NDA,LLC said, "is having that onsite manager to process service orders and handle issues when they arise." He also described the extensive tenant screening process required for all prospective tenants.

Bowen Arnold, also a principal of NDA,LLC described the details of entitlement and financing. "Zoning allows this project to happen, financing however limits this project to being only Farm worker Housing and can only have that use." Once assured that these units could not be converted into other uses, the presentation went into the details of who would live there and how would it be overseen.

The developer currently manages many units and similar projects such as the one in Bonita Springs. They would retain a part ownership position in the project and manage it on the day to day level using their extensive experience.

Here are some of the points that were made in the meeting:

- To qualify to live there 50% (51%) or more of your income in the last 12 months must come from farm WORK.
- All tenants are screened with a background check and for qualifications by a third party and all must meet Federal and State Housing requirements. Fair Housing rules apply.
- Rents are expected to be from \$350.00 to \$650.00 per month for the two and three bedroom units.
- No more than 1.5 people per bedroom may live in a unit.
- Tenants pay their own rents, and are not subsidized by the government or farmer.
- The project will use the “ORENCO SYSTEM” septic system to process, treat and filter waste water. The treated water will be re-used in the palm field for irrigation. This closed loop system occurs below ground and no effluent is released into the ground.
- All aspects of the qualifications of the community and its residents are inspected and verified on an annual basis by State inspectors.

Kami Corbett offered “Treeco felt that the company would benefit from having it’s employees live in clean, new, decent housing that is close to the farm.” She added that a market study would be done at their suggestion and offered along with the application to demonstrate the need for such housing.

Treeco currently has 40 to 50 workers and with the Pine Island Plan limiting land use, farming will continue to expand requiring more workers and more housing.

At the conclusion of the meeting most people in attendance spoke positively about the project. One person, who had seen the company’s project in Bonita Springs described it as knocking her socks off it was so nice. She added that the neighbors, who had originally expressed concerns, now enjoy the project by jogging through the community.