

Miami Herald

COMMISSIONER TRIES TO DELAY PARK BUY

OSCAR MUSIBAY And RICK HIRSCH Herald Staff Writers

April 26, 1994

Metro Commissioner Larry Hawkins wants to block the purchase of a South Dade trailer park that is a key part of a permanent housing plan for farmworkers in South Dade. The housing plan developed by the Everglades Community Association was unanimously approved three months ago by the Metro-Dade Commission. It hinges on the county buying land to temporarily house about 1,500 farmworkers in trailers while permanent homes are built southwest of Florida City.

On Jan. 18, Hawkins and his fellow commissioners approved buying the old Royal Colonial Trailer Park in Leisure City, a 42-acre mobile home park flattened by Hurricane Andrew. But Hawkins had a change of heart after a town hall meeting April 12 with property owners in Naranja Lakes. They complained about moving the farmworkers into the Royal Colonial. After the meeting, Hawkins asked Metro administrators to review the purchase.

"The residents brought up a number of valid issues regarding that whole area down there -- the area that probably still has the most work to do as far as the recovery is concerned," Hawkins said. "I think the residents felt that until there is some sense of normalcy in that area you don't want to put in anything that may be a disruptive force."

Delaying the trailer-park purchase would stall construction of the permanent housing, which was supposed to start June 1 and has already been delayed to July 1, said Enrique Vazquez, deputy director of the Everglades Community Association. As a result of Hawkins' request, the county is reviewing a variety of sites it evaluated before it first recommended the Royal Colonial park, said Diana Gonzalez, head of Metro's department of development and facilities management. "All we are doing is making sure there are no other alternatives to using that trailer park," Gonzalez said. A report should be completed by mid-week, she said.

Gonzalez's office had been negotiating final details of the \$4 million land purchase at 14850 SW 280th St. with owner Tom Vellanti Sr. The county wants to buy the park to house residents of about 250 trailers that would be moved from the Everglades Farmworker Center in South Dade. After the trailers are moved, construction would begin on the first phase of permanent housing -- about 240 homes paid for with a \$20 million grant from the Farmers Home Administration. The second phase of the project -- another 275 units -- would begin after the first section is built.