

Naples Daily News article

Local hospice requests zoning change for \$3.5 million expansion

By LIZ FREEMAN (Contact)

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NAPLES — Avow Hospice is seeking land rezoning with plans to build a \$3.5-million community center on its campus in North Naples.

A public hearing is scheduled for May 7 before the Collier County Planning Commission to consider a zoning change to community facility planned use development for the entire 15.25-acre campus, said Karen Rollins, president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit Avow.

The move would enable all the acreage of the hospice campus to have the same multi-use zoning and rezones some residential parcels with private residences on them that have been purchased in recent years, she said.

The community center will be built on a residential lot that is between the current administration building and another residential lot that was purchased in 2007 with a private home on it. That lot will be used for wetlands mitigation.

In the meantime, permit applications are under review by the county for building a 4,100-square foot community center that will have a room for memorials that can seat 150 people, two classrooms, and two bereavement support group rooms, she said.

"It's kind of an anchor building on the campus to provide more services on campus than off," Rollins said. "When more than 20 people are involved we have to rent for large gatherings."

The building also will allow for an expanded memorial courtyard to become a place for people to go when they want to remember and grieve for someone who has died.

The estimated cost is \$3.5 million and the plan is to start construction by the end of the year. Avow has all of the money needed, which has been raised from a fundraising campaign that started in 2001 and went on for three years she said. At the same time, some pledges are still coming in for the project, she said.

The general contractor for the project is Kraft Construction, which Avow used in 2003 to build the 16-room Frances Georgeson Hospice House.

Avow hospice currently has a census of 165 patients and 125 employees, with patients in their own home and some residing in the hospice house.

George Walter, chairman of the Avow board said he had asked Rollins about all the ways the building would be used and she furnished him with a list of 22 uses.

"It would literally be used every day for some type of event," he said. "We just want a place where the community knows is a safe haven, a quiet place they can come to literally and meditate and pray and remember their loved one."

Rollins said she does not expect to hire more employees to oversee the new community center.

"I would say no at this point, it will require more facility management and event/group coordination but (we're) not planning any increases in jobs with its opening," she said. "It may help us over time to increase counseling and education support roles as we hope it brings more people to our campus for those reasons."