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New RV park set to be outside of Williston; *Air ambulance group targets Levy County for future headquarters and launch area*



The four members of the Levy County Board of County Commissioners present on Tuesday (Nov. 7) are (from left) Matt Brooks, John Meeks, Lilly Rooks and Mike Joyner. Rock Meeks was absent.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 11 2017 at 1:27 p.m.

BRONSON – A developer is seeking to create a new recreational vehicle park near the Levy-Marion County line; and a medical helicopter transportation company continues working to have a headquarters and launch site in Levy County, according to information shared Tuesday morning (Nov. 7) at the Levy County Commission meeting.



Clay Sweger iof EDA Engineering, representing Jose Martin Morales the owner planning to develop the RV park between Williston and the Marion

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County line, tells the County Commission reasons to approve a rezoning request. Owner Morales later took the podium and said he is providing more places for RV owners to locate their vehicles beyond the resort that is in the city limits of Williston. That RV park in the city limits is owned by a different group.

The RV park plan is progressing.

On a motion by County Commissioner Lilly Rooks, seconded by Commissioner Matt Brooks, the County Commission voted 4-0 to approve a request to amend the Levy County Future Land Use Map from Urban Low Density Residential to Commercial on approximately 62 acres on U.S. Highway 27 south of Northeast 25th Street in the Williston Municipal Service District of the unincorporated eastern part of Levy County.

Levy County Planning Department Director Shenley Neely was given permission to transmit a petition to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity for its review. In the past, there was a different state agency to help manage growth in Florida.



PHI Air Medical of Florida Regional Director C. Sean O'Neal prepares for his presentation. This company has 85 helicopters for air medical service and it has 100 used in the oil and gas industry, O'Neal said.

As for the air ambulance service, PHI Air Medical of Florida is seeking to create a headquarters on the Levy County Public Safety compound near Bronson.

PHI Air Medical of Florida Regional Director C. Sean O'Neal gave a presentation to the County Commission to show the company's plan.

Public Safety Director Mitch Harrell said this plan has been in the works since before he accepted the duty of leading public safety.

The County Commission voted 4-0 to approve the company's request for a certification of public convenience and necessity.

PHI writes off tens of millions of dollars in unpaid bills annually, O'Neal said,

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because there is a gap between what insurance, Medicare and patients can pay for the service.

“It’s not our intent to ever inflict more harm to the patient than has been done in the trauma or the medical situation that put them in our care,” O’Neal said.

There is a fee for the service, he added, and the company does recover those funds. He sees this air ambulance service, though, as the most compassionate in regard to billing patients for the transportation that saves lives.

When he was asked if PHI Air Medical of Florida would be able to land at hospitals in Alachua and Marion counties, O’Neal said there would be no reason for any hospital to deny acceptance of a patient via that form of transport.



Dr. Charles Hwang says hospitals in Florida must allow helicopters to deliver patients if they have a helicopter pad for incoming patients. Sitting behind the medical director of Levy County are (from left) Matt Weldon, director of Mosquito Control, and Parks and Recreation; Levy County Property Appraiser Oz Barker; and Solid Waste Department Director Rod Hastings. Weldon received approval for a contract award to C&M Dredging to improve the shoring around Blue Springs. In his Mosquito Control director role, Weldon received approval from the County Commission for the annual contract with the State of Florida. Director Hastings received approval to accept a quote from a company in regard to a

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very old former landfill in the Inglis-Yankeetown area. The monitoring well that is being abandoned cost the county \$5,700 last year; and now it can be capped and closed.

Charles Hwang, M.D., the medical director of Levy County Department of Public safety said he concurs with O'Neal in that regard.

Dr. Hwang works in the emergency room at Shands in Gainesville, as well as serving as the county's medical director.

Dr. Jason Jones also serves as the Medical Director of Levy County EMS and as Associate Medical Director of Lake County EMS. Dr. Jones was not present at the meeting on Tuesday in Bronson.

Currently, ShandsCair is seen as the brand of air medical service helicopter landing in Levy County now.

Dr. Hwang said he is not going to allow the increased ability for air medical service to increase costs to Levy County patients.

LCDPS Director Harrell said he is not changing protocol for Levy County EMS.

"What it does do," Harrell said, "is to provide us with these resources – closer (than out of Gainesville). We are still going to fly the same kind of patients.

"The number might increase," Harrell continued.

He gave the example of a critical traumatic crash victim at the intersection of State Road 26 and U.S. Alt. 27 in Bronson. A helicopter could launch from the LCDPS complex and land in a vacant lot at that very intersection (across the street from Bronson Ace Hardware).

That patient could be loaded and at a hospital equipped to care for the person more quickly than if they were taken by ground transport. Harrell said, and with the time of flight from Gainesville to Bronson, the quicker helicopter then would be PHI Air Medical versus ShandsCair.

There will be an increased number of flights, Harrell said, because of the condition of the patient and the choice to transport the person with the most appropriate method based on time and injuries.

"We don't fly non-critical patients," Harrell said. "We fly critical patients. These are life and death situations where time matters. Time is (less loss of) muscle. Time is tissue – for strokes, for heart attacks; getting them to surgery for traumatic injuries."

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The yellow area on this map shows the planned service area for the future air ambulance service if it becomes based at the Levy County Public Safety complex near Bronson.