

Will migrant labor center help Jupiter?

By Jennifer Brannock
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Jupiter Mayor Karen Golonka wants more time, but Councilor Jim Kuretski said he's not willing to wait any longer to resolve issues between migrant workers who congregate on Center Street and the residents who live there.

Kuretski wants to invest \$1 million of the town's money into a day labor center that would serve as a pick-up point and education and job center for the vast community of migrant workers who have claimed Jupiter as their home. His pleas for action of late are in response to a number of complaints the council has received about litter and loitering problems from Center Street residents over the past several years.

"We need to get together and make a decision -- whatever it is -- and do something," he said. "Doing nothing, in my mind, is no longer an option."

Kuretski said he wants to build the center not only to respond to the complaints of vocal residents, but also to serve the needs of Jupiter's immigrants, who recently received international attention in the form of visits from the Guatemalan Consulate and Vice President Eduardo Stein.

But Tim Steigenga, a local advocate with the Guatemalan aid group Corn-Maya Inc., said the town's migrant workers have no qualms about staying right where they are on Center Street sidewalks. Steigenga favors the construction of a center to put a roof over workers' heads and offer educational opportunities, but said the building will really serve Center Street residents' needs more.

"The immigrants are quite happy with the situation they're in now. We'll have to convince them that this is in their best interests," Steigenga said. "It's not a special service for the immigrant community. It's to solve a problem that has brought out the most people I've ever seen to complain (to the council)."

Golonka and Vice Mayor Donald Daniels have thrown up their hands in opposition to the center in the past several weeks. They expressed concerns about promoting the hiring of undocumented workers to employers who do not pay taxes on them and do not supply them with Workman's Compensation.

Golonka said she wants to organize a special committee to investigate the problem and come up with better solutions.

"A neighborhood code enforcement problem doesn't require a million-dollar solution," Golonka said. "We need to spend more time looking at examples from across the country, and start out with something small to determine if it will succeed."

The council will meet on Oct. 26 for a discussion about migrant issues on Center Street.

Daniels said he hopes to rule out the building of an immigrant work center once and for all. He would like to set up a base in one of the homes near or on Center Street that can be closely monitored by town officials.

"My hope is that at the workshop I can convince my fellow councilors to come back to reality and not spend \$1 million on a labor center," he said. "I am not supporting anything that has

legal slants to it. We should not be supporting making it convenient for employers to pick up workers that they don't pay taxes on."

Whatever council decides may be too little, too late for Center Street residents who have pressed into the council chambers for years seeking resolution.

John Slattery, president of the Jupiter Plantation Homeowner's Association, located near Center Street, said he is unsure whether or not the construction of a labor center is the best solution to their dilemma.

"It's a catch-22 -- you promote illegal employment, but you get them off the street," he said. "So far, I don't think anything they've done has helped the problem. Nothing has changed here."