

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

County can lead in green building

■ Learning centers would pay for themselves and spread the word of sustainability and conservation.

Lee County has the chance to take the regional lead in the promotion of the sort of building that sustains the Earth, instead of depleting it.

A coalition of environmentalists, builders and government agencies want to create a Green Learning Center on a 9-acre tract in rural Alva. It will cost about \$1 million to acquire the house and property where Stan and Colette Corwin have — with the help of architect Rob Andrys — already created a fascinating home, demonstrating how much more wisely we can live in Florida with some shrewd design.

We realize local governments are cutting back. But the Green Learning Center would be a wise investment that would pay for itself. Education centers (others would be in order in other parts of the county) can save the county money by spreading a gospel of sustainability that will conserve water and other resources. That could save the county some of the enormous costs of providing those resources to the public. If home water use can be cut by the use, say, of rainwater cisterns like those at the Corwin house, that's that much less water that has to be found and produced for our growing population.

County commissioners should buy the site. The time is ripe

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PRESSURE MOUNTING

We are in a period of increased awareness of the cost of using resources wastefully. There's an emerging consensus that we have to use water, energy and raw materials frugally, or risk depleting them and ruining our climate in the process.

Costs are coming due in the form of higher energy costs and tougher regulation. Gov. Charlie Crist has committed the state to a dramatic new course in pursuit of "sustainability," with new rules that will require sweeping increases in energy and other resource conservation.

The county weighed in against the now-abandoned proposal for a coal-fired power plant in Glades County. Now we have to hit the other side of that issue, finding ways to dramatically conserve energy.

Both builders and consumers need a place to actually see green building techniques in use. And this is not limited to builders and buyers of new homes. Stan Corwin says, "The greenest thing you can do is not build a green house but 'greenify' an existing house."

Once the center is launched, it is intended to be self-supporting through grants and other forms of income, says John Capece, a LaBelle agricultural engineer/hydrologist and environmentalist who advocates creating the center. The similar Florida House Learning Center in Sarasota, now closed for re-location, was drawing 10,000 visitors a year, and had become an eco-tourist destination.

The University of Florida Extension Service has expressed interest in creating a demonstration site for energy conservation, including the development of fuel crops like jatropha. The Corwin place might serve that purpose well.

TIME TO ACT

Lee County commission Chairman Bob Janes has advocated green building in these pages, writing, "Even if your personal motivation isn't preservation of natural resources, let's think green in another way, the green in your wallet. Sustainable buildings mean consumers will have to pay less for and use less energy. And there is a lot of money to be made in developing green technology. Manufacturers will profit by making and selling sustainable products.

"Government can promote this process by encouraging the science and implementation of green building." Commissioner Ray Judah, who favors the purchase, believes Conservation 20/20 money could be used for that part of the land to be left in its natural state.

Urges commissioners to purchase the Corwin property and launch the Green Learning Center.

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