

January 28, 2014

Dear 4-H Youth, Parents, and Volunteers,

I wanted to send out an update on what is happening with the new 4-H building for Escambia County 4-H youth and encourage you to let the county commissioners hear from you about what you want for your 4-H program. The future of the 4-H program in Escambia County is at risk.

You may have heard that the Escambia County Board of Commission (BOCC) withdrew an agenda item that would have supported moving forward with the construction of a 4-H facility on Stefani Road. This move was not expected and a complete surprise to UF/IFAS Extension faculty, staff, and volunteers. We do not completely understand why this action was taken.

This building was an important promise made in the Memorandum of Understanding that was part of the proposal 4-H youth voted on last year. The building is to be constructed with county LOST (Local Option Sales Tax) funds.

It appears that this move by the BOCC was made in support of a small group of individuals purporting to represent the entire 4-H program. This very small interest group is lobbying on behalf of the entire 4-H program, but in fact they do not represent the majority of needs and wants. Many if not most members of this group are not 4-H members, volunteers or donors, but members of organizations that benefit from 4-H programs and funding. They are not a 4-H or UF/IFAS sanctioned group, and they are representing rumor and misinformation as fact, when the real information is public record and accessible by a simple phone call or email.

The new 4-H building--which would support educational hands-on activities such as agriculture sciences, robotics, clothing and textiles (sewing and clothes construction), food preparation and nutrition, food preservation, marine science, archery, food and meat science, consumer education, public speaking, fine arts, technology for youth, volunteer training and much more—cannot be constructed without the approval of the Escambia County Commission.

The current Langley Bell 4-H Center will be closed in August and the Escambia County 4-H will no longer have a home if this building is not constructed. This means that all activities currently taking place at the Langley Bell 4-H Center (as well as those planned for the future) would come to a standstill.

As you can imagine, this is a serious situation for all of us in the 4-H program. The future of Escambia County 4-H is at dire risk.

One of the primary intentions of this original gift from the Langley Bell family was to advance and strengthen the Escambia County 4-H program. Few other counties have this type of opportunity to utilize the 4-H program for helping youth broadly across Escambia County.

If the entire 4-H community does not speak up, the county commission may move the 4-H center to the north end of the county – away from the center of population. Escambia County 4-H may also lose control of how the resources from the land sale are used for all children in Escambia County, not just those in the northern end of the county.

The county commission has heard a great deal from a small group of people. They need to hear from the broader 4-H community.

I encourage each of you to express your view on the importance of the new 4-H building and the potential far-reaching value of the Escambia County 4-H program. I'd also encourage you to let your voice be heard by our county leaders. Below is the contact information for the Escambia County commissioners. I encourage you to email and call them to ensure that they know how you feel and what is best for the long-term future of the 4-H Youth Development program in Escambia County.

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Sincerely,



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