

Locked in the linear

It's like watching an ant colony.

The Orange County Youth Commission has all the ideals in place—a collected group of individuals all concerned with youth, working to make things happen to benefit the children, teenagers and young adults of this county. Their latest project, that of making a community center a reality, is to be commended for being in touch with the plight of our youth. It acknowledges the boredom that leaves many youngsters to turn to drugs and trouble and aimlessness to pass time.

Our Opinion

The community center concept has been met with wide-ranging support from citizens, as evidenced at a June 27 public hearing sponsored by the youth commission.

Now, according to the OCYC, the next step seems to be the formation of a steering committee. This committee would "function outside of the commission with the task of bringing the community center into being," an OCYC member explained.

On the whole, this seems fine. But listening to the commission's plans for executing this, some red flags fly; for instance, the formation of subcommittees for the purposes of "political action and liaison" and "site selection and procurement."

These no doubt will be considerations in the process of setting up the community center. But breaking down the whole process into such miniscule steps could result in a celebration of details at the expense of the big picture.

Details are important. Doing it right the first time is important. But the bureaucratic lingo of the commission's memos outlining the steering committee's function and purpose is maddeningly inaccessible. It's wordy and spells out small steps that will bring progress on the center down to a mere shuffle. The formation of committees and subcommittees and over-preoccupation with obvious details could eclipse something very important: opportunity.

One red flag flaps and snaps in the breeziness of the commission's apparent dismissal of a school system goal which is listed in the board of supervisor's Capital Improvements Plan: a multi-purpose field house with classrooms to help put off the building of a new high school for a few years.

The commission's memo explains that this field house does not meet the scope of needs that the community center would meet. Is the county to spend money on two separate structures? The county would surely do better if the school system and the youth commission joined forces and built a center that could meet everyone's needs.

The commission has indicated that once a community center exists, the facility could easily serve the entire Orange County Public School system in its programs and facilities.

This sounds like the commission wants to retain all credit for the center, and will graciously allow the schools to use it after they've taken care of everything. It looks too much like the commission is so immersed in what it plans to do that it cannot look up from its project to see what others have already started.

A meeting of minds and a little less concern with the construction of bureaucratic mazes might help the youth commission meet its goal much more efficiently. Failure to do so might leave the commission looking like an ant colony, with only an intricate, linear network of tunnels leading nowhere.