

# SC Convention Center Fund Outlook Bleak

By **BRUCE McPHERSON**  
Sentinel Staff Writer

Chances for getting a \$900,000 federal grant for help in construction of a convention center at Lighthouse Point, which once were bright, now "don't look good at all."

Dave Koester, secretary to the Joint Powers Authority, told that group Wednesday he and other local officials met with representatives of the federal Economic Development Administration who said "it is highly unlikely that the convention center proposal will be approved by EDA for funding"

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this year.

The authority was hoping for the grant to build a \$3-3-million, 60,000 - square - foot convention center at the site.

The alternative now seems to be a \$2.4-million center of about 50,000 square feet and finance it through sale of bonds backed by the local room tax and operating revenues.

Authority members indicated they may just take that route immediately, since the Hilton Hotel chain has stated its intent to build a hotel there with a convention center nearby.

Koester said that the new EDA regional officer in Seattle, Wash., Mark Smith, reported that EDA has been informed by Washington, D.C., recently not to anticipate an increase in allocations.

Smith also said demands for EDA funds are greater than expected this year, especially in urban areas (such as Seattle) where large cutbacks in jobs have taken place.

Koester said EDA estimates it will receive about \$170 million this fiscal year. About \$18 million of that will be for the western regional office in Seattle, whereas up to \$40 million was anticipated. "Smith said about \$12 million of that \$18 million is earmarked for urban

areas," Koester added.

EDA funds are available to counties where unemployment rates are 6 per cent and greater and are awarded for projects that will help lower that rate. The authority has contended that unemployment, which reaches 13 per cent in the winter months, would be alleviated with the center through creation of jobs, since the January-to-March period is prime time for conventions.

Authority president Sam Leask III and vice - president Rus McCallie both complained that EDA led them to believe everything was going okay with the application.

"I feel we've been sort of lulled to sleep," McCallie said in reference to the point that EDA requested the authority to drop its original 1968 grant application until some details were met.

"Well, that's where we are now," Koester said.

"Right behind the eight-ball," The authority decided to "continue our exercise in futility" and submit the new Overall Economic Development Program report of the county to EDA today. The Joint Powers had been told by EDA to submit the report in October, since allocations are announced about Nov. 1.

Koester said the convention

center "has no status at all right now" with EDA because the report has yet to be submitted, but that the prospects of getting on EDA's "A" or "B" list for appropriations "doesn't look very good at all."

Authority members said they are interested in seeing what can be developed now and will meet with architects next week. They also appointed financial consultants Wednesday and an advisory committee composed of Brent Smith, James Hammond, Robert Ward, Burke Pease, Emmet V. Beauregard, Col. Frank Ketcham and Ben Pino. Three more are to be added later.

## LOW COMBAT TOLL

SAIGON (AP) — The total of American combat deaths in Indochina dropped to 38 last week, the lowest weekly toll in nearly 4½ years, the U.S. Command announced. But the toll for the South Vietnamese increased 40 per cent over the week before, and enemy casualties went up slightly.

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