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Company scraps plan for Indiana immigrant detention center

A private prison management company on Monday scrapped plans to build a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in northern Indiana following fierce local opposition, county commissioners said. Nashville, Tennessee-based CoreCivic had proposed locating a \$100 million, 1,200-bed center about 10 miles (16 kilometers) east of South Bend. Elkhart County Commissioner Mike Yoder says CoreCivic officials informed the three county commissioners Monday morning that they would withdraw their petition to rezone farmland for the center. Yoder said the company didn't give a reason why. Commissioner Frank Lucchese confirmed the decision by the company previously known as Corrections Corp. of America. "I think CoreCivic read the writing on the wall and saw it wasn't going to be a good fit for Elkhart County," Lucchese said. CoreCivic had said its proposal was in response to an ICE request for information on possible facilities within 100 miles of Chicago. ICE detention centers have failed to win approval in at least four other communities in Indiana and Illinois over the past several years. The Elkhart County Plan Commission had scheduled a Feb. 8 vote on the company's rezoning request. Goshen Mayor Jeremy Stutsman, wrote a letter opposing the construction of the detention center and gained a number of co-signers from the business community, was pleased with CoreCivic's decision. "(I'm) obviously pretty happy they decided to move on and very grateful for the amount of community members, businesses leaders and elected officials for their work to benefit our county," Stutsman said. Goshen City Council at-large member Julia King, who spoke out against the facility last week, said she felt celebratory immediately after learning the news. "It just feels like such a positive statement about who Goshen and Elkhart County (are)," King said. "It demonstrates the power of grassroots organization in a big way . and to the power that ordinary people can have to shape their communities." Another opponent, the Coalition Against the Elkhart County Immigration Detention Center held a news conference last week to denounce the proposal. The group claims about 35,000 members in Indiana, Illinois and Michigan. Richard Aguirre, a coalition co-coordinator, has said that the center would promote the inhumane treatment of individuals living in the U.S. illegally. Many at the news conference pointed to Elkhart County's large Latino population. "Of course we help contribute greatly to our communities economies into the community's livelihood. But above all else, we deserve to not live in fear because we are human beings," said Marbella Chavez, another co-coordinator for the coalition. "We are your neighbors, teachers, co-workers and your classmates." The American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana also opposed the detention center. Ashley Toruno, a community engagement associate with the ACLU, said that it was concerned with private companies like CoreCivic operating outside of the public oversight and accountability. A call to an ICE spokeswoman for comment Monday reached a recording saying the agency's public affairs representatives were unavailable because of the federal government shutdown.