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Printed on page R3

Poinciana Warned of Little Money for Projects

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POINCIANA | It's all about money.

Osceola County Commissioner Brad Arrington and members of the county staff bemoaned the current economic situation during a town hall meeting at the Poinciana Community Center on Jan. 26, saying there just isn't any money available to get much done in the way of capital projects in the near future ... not only in Poinciana, but throughout the county.

"It's all a balancing act," Arrington told an audience of about 250 Poinciana residents. "We've got this plan and we've got that plan. What we don't have is money."

It wasn't what the audience wanted to hear.

"We live in a rat hole!" Miguel Romero, who has lived in Poinciana since 1984, angrily told the officials in complaining about the county's inability to provide the community with enough access roads to accommodate a development that has grown to a population of more than 70,000.

"If we have a fire, we're going to die here," Romero said of the problems that exist with getting emergency vehicles into and out of the community during times of heavy traffic. "You say you represent us. Do something!"

For years, there has been a plan in place to extend Marigold Boulevard to provide a much-needed additional access road to the community. The new road would be called the Poinciana Parkway.

But as Greg Hostetter of the county's public works department pointed out, that project is currently on hold.

"Right now, there's no funding," he said. "It's a \$166 million project."

The county is considering a public/private partnership with Avatar, Poinciana's primary developer, to get the project back on track, he added, and there is hope of getting government grants to fund part of the effort.

Donna Renberg of the Osceola County Office of Management and Budget noted that the county has a five-year capital improvement plan in place that lists a number of projects for Poinciana.

"But probably very few will be approved in the next year because of limited funds," she said.

A large mixed development combining homes and retail facilities along South Lake Toho and a major connector road that would ease traffic woes are also on the back burner because of a lack of money, the audience was told. And even projects that are currently under way, such as the widening of Poinciana Boulevard and resurfacing Pleasant Hill Road, are only going to be partially completed because the funds are not available for later phases to be undertaken.

Arrington said the county is hoping to get more federal money from President Barack Obama's stimulus package so that some of those projects can go forward.

"We are pushing hard to bring more stimulus dollars to Osceola County," he said.

In the meanwhile, however, the county, which laid off 150 employees in 2009 because of budget constraints, doesn't have the money available to fund the projects that are on its list to get done.

[What do you think? Contact Mike Grogan about this article at reportermailbox@gmail.com.]

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