

The reporter, on the first few lines of page 2 of this article, nailed the developer down to a starting date of November 2008, to be completed in 2010.

26  
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# Residents Balk At 6-Lane Proposal

## Planners say a wider Lithia-Pinecrest Road will reduce future congestion.

By DANN LAWRENCE WHITE  
The Tampa Tribune

LITHIA — It's a choice between convenience and lifestyle.

County planners and consultants warn that unless Lithia-Pinecrest Road is widened to six lanes from County Road 39 to State Road 60, the 10.7-mile drive will consume more than an hour's worth of a driver's time 10 years from now.

However, residents who moved to rural Lithia to escape the rapidly urbanizing Bran-

don area say they are willing to put up with the congested road if it means curbing development in their community.

"It's a lifestyle," said Terry Muse, a construction engineer who purchased 10 acres in Lithia 10 years ago where he breeds horses part time. Muse was among more than 50 residents who attended a public meeting about proposed improvements to Lithia-Pinecrest Road. "I don't mind spending a little more time in the car to preserve that lifestyle."

County officials and consultants HDR Engineering Inc. of Tampa discussed the project Dec. 4 at the Palmetto Club at FishHawk Ranch in Lithia.

Driving the road project is a 3,200-home project that Newland Communities will begin developing adjacent to its FishHawk Ranch development. As part of its development agreement with the county, Newland agreed to make \$72 million in road improvements, including widening Lithia-Pinecrest Road to four lanes from the Lithia Ridge subdivision north of River Hills to Bloomingdale Ave-

See 6-LANE PROPOSAL, Page 27 ►



Tribune file photo by ROBERT BURKE

Recent growth along Lithia-Pinecrest Road has brought more traffic, and planners see that trend continuing.

## 6-LANE PROPOSAL

Continued From Page 26

nue.

Because Newland must widen the road to build the development, that will be the first section of Lithia-Pinecrest to be widened. Construction is expected to begin in November 2008 and be completed in 2010. The county has not identified funding for improvements along the remainder of the road.

So, in addition to presenting a project development and environmental study, Newland consultants CPH Engineers presented residents at the meeting with three alternatives for that section of Lithia-Pinecrest showing different options for median openings.

27  
• BRANDON NEWS & TRIBUNE • WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2007 • TBO.COM

options for median openings. For Lithia Ridge resident Patricia Bradford, the best alternative by far is the one showing a 46-foot median in front of the Shoppes at Lithia, with the potential to widen the road to six lanes.

"Pulling out of the shopping center is already very dangerous," she said. "Widening the road will only increase the traffic volume and speed. It's a recipe for disaster. This is the safest alternative."

Hillsborough County commissioners launched the Lithia-Pinecrest Road study in 2005 at the request of the Greater Brandon Chamber of Commerce, then chaired by Bloomingdale East resident George May. Chamber members said Brandon needed the wider north-south thoroughfare because of the development planned for the area. State Rep. Trey Traviesa, R-

Tampa, agreed to seek state funding, and U.S. Rep. Adam Putnam, R-Bartow, promised to look into federal funding because the road is a designated hurricane evacuation route.

However, two years into the project, just as the traffic studies have been completed and are about to be turned over to the Hillsborough County Commission and the Florida Department of Transportation for approval to begin the design process, residents, especially those living in the rural areas south of FishHawk Ranch, are becoming apprehensive about the proposed widening.

Lithia resident Tim Golden said he moved from Bloomingdale to escape the congestion

See 6-LANE PROPOSAL, Page 36 ▶

36

## 6-LANE PROPOSAL

Continued From Page 27

and fears making Lithia-Pinecrest four lanes to County Road 39 will invite urbanization.

"The majority of the people moved to this area because of the rural lifestyle, and we're trying to maintain it," he said. "Urban services [county water and sewer] end at FishHawk, and there's no major developments planned outside the urban service area. So why are

you including that section of Lithia-Pinecrest in the study?"

Reg Alford, county project engineer, said the section of Lithia-Pinecrest from S.R. 60 to C.R. 39 was included because of land use classifications and potential development along the road. Based on those classifications, that section of Lithia-Pinecrest could see a substantial amount of traffic in the next 10 years, he said, an estimated 33,000 vehicles per day.

"I moved out here for quality of life," said Muse.

May responded, "Spending an hour to go 10 miles on a stretch of road is not quality of

life."

Lithia resident Joe Jansky doesn't see how widening Lithia-Pinecrest will solve the traffic problem because the majority of drivers are headed toward the interstate to the west. "You're going to tear up a beautiful road. Just widen FishHawk [Boulevard] to eight lanes," he suggested.

He and several other neighbors recommended the county stop approving more development. Then it won't have to worry about additional traffic.

"Stop cramming houses in here," Jansky said.

"Growth is not revenue pos-

DECEMBER 12, 2007 • BRANDON NEWS & TRIBUNE •

itive or even revenue neutral," said George Hebbard, a Lithia-Springs Road resident since 1968. "It's revenue negative. The only ones who benefit are the landowners."

Leaving the growth management debate to politicians, Alford, who also is project manager for the FishHawk Boulevard, Boyette Road and Bell Shoals Road widening projects, said he would do his best to coordinate the construction so residents would be inconvenienced as little as possible.

According to the county's traffic study, the section of Lithia-Pinecrest between State

Road 60 and Lumsden Road has an average of 12,600 to 14,600 vehicles per day, and the section from Lumsden to Bloomingdale Avenue sees 16,700 to 26,500 vehicles. The Bloomingdale to FishHawk link averages 17,000 to 25,100 vehicles, per day, and the southern stretch to C.R. 39 gets from 9,100 to 15,600 vehicles.

By the year 2018, the earliest the construction of the entire road can be completed, the counts will increase to 31,600 on the S.R. 60 to Lumsden section, 43,300 on the Lums-

See 6-LANE PROPOSAL, Page 37 ►

## 6-LANE PROPOSAL

Continued From Page 36

den to Bloomingdale section, 38,400 on the Bloomingdale to FishHawk section and 23,800 on the FishHawk to C.R. 39 section.

If the road were to remain two lanes, all sections would most likely be rated as failed roadways. The average time to travel its length would be 74 minutes. If widened to six lanes, the drive would take 21 minutes.

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