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Osceola County loses out on stimulus money for the Poinciana Parkway

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POINCIANA – Osceola County has lost out on federal stimulus money to help with the construction of the long awaited Poinciana Parkway, the county manager said.

Acting County Manager Don Fisher told a group of Poinciana business owners on June 9 that the county had applied for federal stimulus money, known as TIGER grants, to assist in the construction of this roadway.

“Unfortunately, no project in the state of Florida got any of the TIGER grants, so there is a round two of the TIGER funds that we’ll apply for,”

Fisher said. “That’s what we’re going to do over the next couple of weeks and get that application in.”



Steve Schwartz

Acting County Manager Don Fisher discusses Osceola’s plans to help finance the Poinciana Parkway with members of the Poinciana Area Council.

Provided through the U.S. Department of Transportation, TIGER stands for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, and is part of the economic stimulus plan that allocated \$1.5 billion for the National Surface Transportation System. TIGER grants fund local transportation projects, including highway repairs and building new roads.

The Poinciana Parkway will be a 10-mile road running through parts of Osceola and Polk counties, beginning at the intersection of Marigold Avenue and Cypress Parkway in Poinciana in Osceola County and stretching northwest to the intersection of County Road 54 and U.S. Highway 17-92 in Polk County. The highway is being built by Avatar, the main developer of residential properties in Poinciana.

Osceola and Polk County governments both approved agreements with Avatar in December 2006, allowing the developer to use condemnation powers to acquire rights of way for the new roadway, intended to provide Poinciana residents with easier access to Interstate 4 and the theme parks.

The project has slowed down in recent years, in part because of environmental permitting issues, since the parkway would cut through a wetlands habitat area.

Fisher noted that Osceola County is “trying to pull the funding together” to get Poinciana Parkway built.

“Avatar is building the road,” Fisher told members of the Poinciana Area Council during the business group’s June 9 meeting at Solivita. “And we hope to partner with Avatar on this.”

He also stressed that motorists will have to pay tolls to use the parkway.



“If Poinciana Parkway goes through, I hope everyone knows it would be a toll road,” Fisher said, adding that the revenues from it would help finance the parkway's long term maintenance.

Osceola County continues to struggle with budget problems, brought on by the collapse of the housing market and with it, a virtual halt in the local construction industry, which along with tourism has been one of the mainstays of the county's economy.

Declining tax revenues have forced county leaders to make painful budget cuts for the past two years, and Fisher said they're not done yet.

“We're going to have to reduce services by \$30 million, as best as we can guess,” he said. “We're looking at things like library closures on a rotation schedule, and salary reductions to county employees.”

So far, he noted, 25 percent of the county's workforce has been eliminated.

Rather than rely on home construction to return in the future, Fisher said Osceola commissioners are hoping to diversify the local economy.

“The county used to have the philosophy, build the houses and people will come,” he said. “Now we've reversed that philosophy and we want the jobs first and then the houses can be built.”

Despite these money challenges, Fisher said Osceola County hopes to launch its first recycling program soon.

“We're moving forward with a curbside program,” he said. “Right now, we've got two trash days and one yard trash day.” A recycling day would be added to the rotation, he said.

“Would you be willing to pay \$3.50 a month to keep your two trash days and then get your bins for recycling?” he asked. “We'll have a couple of variations that we'll take to the commission. The commissioners all seem to be on board with this.”

What do you think? Contact Michael Freeman about this article at Reportermailbox@gmail.com.

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