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DECEMBER 2021



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# Welcome back home winter residents

By STEVE LEE  
News Reporter

The Zephyrhills News gives a hearty welcome back to our winter visitors who are returning at this time of year. We are publishing this special section to catch you up on news, events and various changes within the city and surrounding areas that you might have missed while you were away.

While the national, state and local scene continues to be affected by the coronavirus pandemic, it has lessened as the year progressed and life as we know it is somewhat returning to normal with businesses recovering and people becoming more active.

Here are some of the headlines we ran in *The Zephyrhills News* while you were gone:

In April, an executive order from the Pasco County Administrator's Office partially rescinded a countywide mask mandate. Mask requirements remained in place for courthouses, hospitals and schools.

Also that month, an iconic landmark was restored when the rebuilt Crystal Bar opened off U.S. 301. The original building burned down in 2019.

During the summer, the city got a second visit from Governor Ron DeSantis, who stopped by city hall to sign the state's \$101.5 billion budget. Including this fall, the governor visited Zephyrhills three times this year.

It was a busy summer in the city and surrounding areas. Road project designed to make the area safer to drive, walk and bike continued. Traffic lights and road reconfigurations on U.S. 301 and the Pretty Pond area continued, but a State Road 54 project was halted and remains in limbo.

Programs continue to expand at the new Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness

Center, the city expanded its reclaimed water program and the local police department made major inroads with a special unit that helped get drugs off the streets.

Downtown events have returned with the Veterans and Christmas parades, along with a Halloween festival. Also contributing to a resurgence of downtown growth and expansion was the official opening of the Fraternal Eagles Aeries 3752 in the old Wells Fargo building. That charitable organization had been located near the New River Branch Library.

New projects that continue to be worked on this fall include a new veterans clinic, large drive-thru car wash and expansion of Simons Road, which will eventually connect to Fort King Road. Along the new State Road 56 corridor between U.S. 301 and Morris Bridge Road a new community is being built. Two Rivers is projected to encompass 3,405 acres and include 6,400 residential units, schools, along with recreational and conservation areas.

Also this fall, the city approved moving forward on resurrecting Hercules Park, which formerly was the location of the city pool, and plans for renovating the old downtown movie theatre.

*The Zephyrhills News* extended its longstanding place in the community by celebrating its 110th anniversary. Publisher/editor Jan Linville continues to focus on the best local news coverage with reporters Steve Lee and Andy Warrener bringing you that information.

Sales manager Theresa Leblanc helps advertisers promote their businesses and products. Nancy King is the graphic artist, Wendy McElroy handles classified ads, Cindy DeMatteo is the accounting manager and James Bannon oversees circulation.

# Mask ban lifted in Pasco County



*Schools, courthouses and hospitals retain mask requirements despite executive order from county administrator*

By Steve Lee  
April 8, 2021

A mandate to wear face coverings in Pasco County, initiated in June of 2020 as an effort to combat spreading the coronavirus, has been rescinded somewhat but not completely.

On April 5, an executive order from the Pasco County Administrator's office came down declaring masks would no longer be required. The order was due, in part, to lower COVID-19 hospitalization rates and a recent increase in vaccinations against the virus.

Among county residents 65 and older, 70 percent have been vaccinated with an additional 57 percent of 50 and older receiving at least one dose of the vaccine. Now, all state residents are eligible for vaccination shots at such places as retail pharmacies, hospitals and doctor's offices.

Nonetheless, wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and frequent hand-washing are recommended until further notice. The county also recommends wearing masks indoors.

"Increasingly, Pasco County residents are getting vaccinated and we're seeing fewer people with severe COVID-19 symptoms in area hospitals," said Dan Biles, the county's administrator. "It's the right time to relax the face covering requirement in Pasco County."

Biles noted that while the mask mandate has been lifted, certain companies or locales have the option of deciding policy at their own discretion.

"Local businesses have the authority to require customers to wear face masks," he said, adding, "The county supports the continued efforts to reduce the spread of the virus."

Not everyone, however, is on board with lifting the face covering ban. Masks remain required on public transportation, in county schools and at the main courthouses in Dade City and New Port Richey. There are other

locales as well, such as hospitals and other businesses.

For now, schools at every grade level in the county still require masks to be worn on campuses and in district offices. That goes for students, staff and visitors alike.

Pasco School Superintendent Kurt Browning, who last year had his own bout with COVID-19, wasted little time in responding to the ease of restrictions by the county administrator by recording a video posted on the school board's web site.

"I cannot in good conscience abandon our health and safety protocols at this time," he said in a press release from the school board offices. "Our protocols have helped to prevent, and certainly reduce, the spread of COVID-19 among our students and staff."

The authority of Pasco Schools to require masks is dependent on whether or not Governor DeSantis' Executive Order is extended beyond the expiration date of April 26. If the Executive Order is not extended, the district will have no choice but to make masks optional.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention continues to recommend wearing of masks in schools as Florida remains under an emergency order until April 26. That order could be extended by Governor Ron DeSantis, who for the most part has supported business openings and in-school teaching during the pandemic while promoting a seniors first agenda for the vaccine rollouts.

Steve Hegarty, a school district spokesman, reported that positive cases of COVID-19 among students and staff decreased significantly since January. There was, however, an increase in March, likely related to spring break. Still, he noted the increases were below the number of positive cases reported earlier this year.

As for the AdventHealth hospitals in Zephyrhills, Dade City and Wesley Chapel, masks and social distancing will remain in affect for now.

"Wearing a mask is one of the most selfless acts you can do to protect yourself and others in public," said Robin McGuinness, senior executive officer of patient outcomes for AdventHealth's West Florida Division. "We encourage everyone to get vaccinated if they are eligible and to continue to social distance, cover their mouths and nose and sanitize hands frequently to lower the number of people contracting COVID-19."

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# Crystal Bar has reopened

Landmark watering hole in Zephyrhills has been rebuilt after original site burned down in 2019

By Steve Lee  
April 1, 2021

At long last, the Crystal Bar has reopened. A soft opening for the landmark gathering place in Zephyrhills took place last Friday at noon. The original structure burned down in 2019 and has been replaced.

An official grand opening is not scheduled until the weekend of April 23-24. In the interim, longtime and even new customers no doubt will continue to spend time at the newly refurbished watering hole, which was rebuilt this past year.

Of course, the reopening drew plenty of family, as well as longtime customers who frequented the former bar. Among the notable family members were siblings Karol Sealander, Gerri Belluso, Rene Hill, along with brothers Bob and Kurt Geddes.

At noon on Friday, the Crystal Bar officially reopened with Bob Geddes welcoming the first wave of guests as they arrived: "We're open. C'mon in. The beer's cold."

"We're proud to be able to serve the community again," Sealander said. "It's not the same. It never really will be the same, but the name's still there. Mom and dad will be proud of us, for sure."

Making the soft opening even more special is that it came on what could've been the 92nd birthday of the family's matriarch, Jerry Geddes.

"I'm thrilled I'm here," Kurt Geddes said. "It's mom's birthday. My mother broke water with me behind the bar."

Jerry's Crystal Bar & Package Store opened in 1954. Jerry and Bob Geddes, both of whom have passed away, relocated from Chicago to Tampa and purchased a gas station in the Hyde Park area in the early 1950s. They later sold it and built the Crystal Bar along Gall Boulevard. The location remained the same and the bar retained a full liquor license.

While masks are required to enter the building, once inside people removed them to drink and socialize with family and friends. Unlike the former building, smoking is not permitted inside, but there are designated areas outside.

"The nation's healing, so let's socialize again," Bob Geddes said, adding "It's a no-nonsense style bar."

There is a 24-foot-high ceiling in the 5,000-square-foot building, which is about 2,000-square-foot larger than the old building, and the bar extends out into one large room. At the far north end there is a spacious bandstand. Video bar games are mounted to a side wall and there are four new pool tables.

Shooting pool on one of those tables last Friday afternoon were former regulars Russ VanDam and Matthew McDonald.

"It's beautiful," said McDonald, who is retired from the U.S. Navy. "It's the atmosphere, it's smoke-free and the pool tables are awesome. They're off the charts."

Also shooting pool at another table were Mona Bartle and Mike Page. Bartle bought a beer for her late husband.

"I was waiting for this place to reopen, because I'm within walking distance," said Bartle, adding that while the Crystal was being rebuilt "I didn't go out. I sat by my pool."

Added Page, "It's cool that they brought it back. It's awesome with all this space."

Against one wall is a piece of the original bar. The family is not sure of what to do with it yet, but wanted to preserve it. Sealander, whose husband Ed's company built the new place, figures they might put a glass top on and place photos of her parents and the family underneath.

The Crystal is open seven days a week and closes at 2 a.m. It opens at 10 a.m. daily except for Sunday when the doors open at 11 a.m.



STEVE LEE

Above: Family members who decided on rebuilding the Crystal Bar that their late parents opened in 1954 stand in front of the back entrance. They are: (left to right) Karol Sealander, Gerri Belluso, Bob Geddes, Rene Hill and Kurt Geddes.

Left: Longtime friends at the bar were Nancy Crane and Sharon Smith.



Above: Tending bar on opening day, as they will be often at the rebuilt Crystal Bar, were Sophia Geddes and Valerie Mooney.



Left: Many former customers and some newcomers gathered around the bar and nearby tables.

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# Governor inks \$101.5 billion state budget at city hall

*Ron DeSantis makes second appearance in Zephyrhills over past three months*

By Steve Lee  
June 3, 2021

For the second time in three months the governor of Florida came to Zephyrhills for a significant act. On Wednesday afternoon in council chambers at city hall, Ron DeSantis signed the Florida Leads state budget he approved after this spring's legislative sessions in Tallahassee.

For the fiscal year of 2021-22 Florida's budget totals \$101.5 billion, which includes \$169 million in tax relief. The governor vetoed \$1.5 billion in spending, including \$1.35 million from federal funds received under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

"We're very excited to sign the budget for this year into law," DeSantis said. "There have been a lot of people over the last year, the last year and a half, that said thank God I live in Florida."

In March DeSantis made a surprise visit to Zephyrhills. His message that morning in the parking lot of the old SunTrust Building on Gall Boulevard was vowing to expand vaccine dosages to more seniors and other various groups throughout the state.

That marked the first by a Florida governor since Rick Scott came here in 2012 to tout job growth in Pasco County.

On hand Wednesday were local dignitaries, city and community leaders, and politicians representing east Pasco. Among that group were State Representative Randy Maggard, a longtime Dade City resident serving District 38; Danny Burgess, a state senator who grew up in Zephyrhills and serves District 20; Wilton Simpson, president of the Florida Senate from Trilby; and county commissioner Ron Oakley from Dade City.

DeSantis noted that he came to Zephyrhills at Simpson's behest.

"The region here should feel very proud," the governor said. "We asked Senator Simpson where (the signing) would have the greatest success and he thought there would be no better place than Zephyrhills."

The state budget funds disaster preparedness, supports men and women of law enforcement and first responders, prioritizes students and teachers, and continues to protect the state's environment.

"We made a decision as other states kept locking citizens down we'd lift people up in Florida," the governor said. "We worked hard to get people back to work in our state."

DeSantis, who earlier in the day spoke at a restaurant in New Smyrna Beach, noted that the approved budget did not result in increased taxes. In fact, it came while maintaining the lowest per capita tax burden in the nation.

"When we came into this legislative session I knew we were going to be strong," DeSantis said, noting that the state should have about \$10 billion in reserves in a state that often deals with hurricanes and natural disasters.

The governor said in April the state took in \$800 million more than some estimates, adding, "That puts us in an incredibly strong position."

Comparing New York's state budget as being twice the size of Florida's, DeSantis said, "We're very prudent in how we spend money."

On education, DeSantis noted that while during the coronavirus pandemic the teacher's union "sued us to close the schools, at the end of the day the teachers wanted to get back."

Funding various school programs and raising the minimum K-12 teacher salary to \$47,500 are among the strides the governor mentioned in education.

On the environment he said \$625 million is earmarked for Everglades restoration, beach nourishment, rising sea levels and water resources.

"That is important when you have 1,300 miles of coastline" DeSantis said.



Above: Governor Ron DeSantis signs the state budget on Wednesday afternoon in council chambers at city hall as local politicians Wilton Simpson and Danny Burgess look on.



Above: Governor Ron DeSantis displays the state budget he signed.



Above: Governor Ron DeSantis speaks about the state's budget at city hall.



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# Road projects continue to move forward in Zephyrhills



Above: There are still some things to do but the Pretty Pond/301 Project is nearing completion.



Above: The soon-to-be signaled intersection at Medical Arts Court, looking west from in front of the Panera Bread restaurant.

## Two projects are aimed at making Zephyrhills and Pasco County safer places to drive, walk and bike

By Andy Warrener  
July 1, 2021

The first project is one that's finally nearing completion and that's the one known as the Pretty Pond/301 Project. This project is primarily an intersection improvement that entails a bit more than just three intersections. It's a joint effort from the City of Zephyrhills, the Florida Department of Transportation, the contractor and design engineer and it's faced some challenges.

"All told there have been about 45 days of delays on the project," Project Manager and Zephyrhills Public Works Director Shane LeBlanc said. "We've had weather delays but other things have factored in. We've had labor shortages, fuel shortages, the price of concrete and asphalt has gone up."

LeBlanc mentioned that just getting the mast arms that the traffic signals are installed on had a, "Twenty-eight-week lead time." The good news is the mast arms are up and the lights are installed. One of the biggest pieces of the puzzle, yet to be completed, is the "traffic separator" that will block through traffic from crossing U.S. Highway 301 between the two shopping centers. New traffic signals at Pretty Pond and at Medical Arts Court will provide access to the shopping centers.

"It's been a major problem if you wanted to cross 301 from Pretty Pond and you used to not be able to turn south, you'd have to turn north on 301 and then U-turn or cut through the shopping center to come back south," LeBlanc said. "Now, it's going to be improved access to the shopping centers and it's going to keep the traffic moving and improve safety."

Even with the delays, the project is slated to be completed sometime in mid-August. The traffic separator and the final asphalt paving are two more of the bigger pieces that have to go

in. There are no plans for complete closure of 301. The final paving will be conducted at night and there will only be certain lane closures as opposed to closing the whole road and setting detours. Even so, an enterprising motorist might try to avoid that section of 301 when we get into August and that final portion of the project is commencing. The \$2.1-million project is covered by a state appropriation.

The intersection improvements on CR54 are nearing commencement. That project is a joint city-county effort with Zephyrhills on the hook for half the cost but the county is responsible for the execution of the project. It entails a number of intersection and shoulder improvements from basically the Wawa at Gall Boulevard and CR54, going east all the way to 23rd Street. The project technically starts just west of Dairy Road where previous widening was completed. Additionally, the intersection at Wire Road/12th Street and CR54 will have mast arms replace the cables that hold the traffic signals. Mast arms are becoming more common than cables due to their stability and the ease of working on them.

"We like them (mast arms) for their maintenance purposes," Project Manager and Pasco County Technical Specialist III Patricia Arndt said. "We've been using them in the county east of U.S. 41."

Aside from the mast arm switchover, Wire Road/12th Street will get designated right and left turn lanes. Further down CR54, 23rd Street will get a traffic signal light on mast arms. The south side of 23rd Street will get a designated left turn lane.

There are a number of safety measures and accommodations for pedestrians, too. A 10-foot multi-use path on the south side of CR54 will run from Dairy Road, all the way to 23rd Street. On the north side, a five-foot sidewalk will connect to existing paths at Dairy Road and terminate at 23rd Street.

"It's a safety project," Arndt said.

"Additional pedestrian signals at the intersection, which we don't have right now, will improve public safety."

The project hasn't launched just yet. Johnson Engineering was awarded the design contract. Advertisements for construction bids went out in February and now the BOCC is close to making a decision to award the contract. Arndt said that she expects the announcement to be made at the Aug. 10 BOCC meeting.

"Once we start, the plan is for one year of construction," Arndt said.



Above: A look east on County Road 54 past the Wawa gas station where the Pasco County improvements are set to commence.



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# Tropical Storm Elsa spares Zephyrhills

*Minimal flooding and lower winds less than hurricane levels leaves the area virtually unscathed*

By Steve Lee  
July 8, 2021

Last Friday, the National Weather Service reported a tropical storm in the Atlantic Ocean that officially became Hurricane Elsa and it headed for Florida. Locally, as in most places within the cone of uncertainty, people went into disaster preparedness mode.

In essence, city, county and state officials made sure they were ready for potential disastrous conditions with the storm alternating from tropical storm to a category 1 hurricane and back as it swirled through the Caribbean and up along the west coast of Florida.

"We're prepared for the worst and hoping for the best. Thankfully it's not projected to intensify tonight," city manager Billy Poe said on Tuesday evening. "As soon as you take one too lightly that's the one that's going to intensify and blast you."

For Zephyrhills and nearby east Pasco residents, along with most of west central Florida, there was no such intensifying — this time. The local area was spared for the most part with the exception of a few flooded areas from overnight storms lasting into early Wednesday morning.

"Fortunately, Tropical Storm Elsa didn't batter

the city of Zephyrhills too bad," said Shane LeBlanc, the city's public works director. "Luckily, we dodged a bullet this go-round."

There could, however, be more in the chamber. As the first hurricane of the 2021 season, Elsa was initially designated by the National Hurricane Center as the fifth tropical storm in the Atlantic. That came on June 1, five days ahead of last year's first tropical storm, Eduardo. The first storm in the Atlantic does not typically form until sometime in August.

Over the weekend as the storm increased to hurricane status, officials in Cuba evacuated 180,000 residents amid concerns about flooding. By Sunday, Governor Ron DeSantis put together an emergency order as tropical warnings were issued for the Florida Keys.

As was the case throughout the state, local officials prepared as best as they could. LeBlanc and Poe put plans in place to deal with dangerous weather conditions. That entailed pumping down retention ponds, cleaning storm grades and fueling emergency equipment.

LeBlanc said a six-member strike team, led by street superintendent Rob Funnell, was on call overnight to be ready for a quick response if needed.

"Storm preparations involve every city department to ensure the safety of all residents and employees," LeBlanc said. "We had to prepare, with all hands on deck. We can use Tropical Storm Elsa as a training exercise."

City workers worked on Wednesday with the U.S. Post Office and Zephyrhills Municipal Airport among the places operating as usual. Poe noted that if it got too windy that pilots likely would take typical precautions and seek an alternative airport.

Ironically, Poe said city officials are working to update a storm master plan that is not quite ready. A so-called dry run like this week's storm will give local officials more information on handling such an event in the future.

For now, it's about making sure generators are working, retention ponds are drained in preparation to handle heavy rains and that Federal Emergency Management Agency protocols are in place.

"It's making sure everybody has the proper FEMA forms should we need them, but, hopefully, we don't" Poe said.

We didn't this time.



Above and left: A duck prunes his feathers in the water of a flooded area of Zephyrhills Lake. A picnic bench was partially submerged at another flooded section of the lake.



Below: Several areas, including this part of Zephyrhills Park, were flooded by Wednesday morning as the storm passed the west coast of Florida.

STEVE LEE



Above: A city public works truck is shown parked next to a generator at the intersection of Court Street and C Avenue.



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**Christmas** has a different meaning to everyone, and that meaning can change from year to year, depending on what fate has brought your way. For some, it has been a year of prosperity... for others, it has been a year of loss. Fortunately, time has a way of healing, and letting us go forward — to celebrate again. Whatever the year has brought your way, we want you to know our family's thoughts are with you.



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# Fits and starts and zoom

*Despite opening in the most challenging of circumstances, the Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness Center has weathered the early storm and is zooming ahead*

By Andy Warrener  
July 15, 2021

The buzz around the new Zephyrhills tennis facility, named after one of the town's dearly-departed tennis stars, was reaching a fever pitch, early in 2020. The City of Zephyrhills invested in it, there was private investment coming in, future CEO Pascal Collard put close to seven figures of his own money into it. Then the COVID-19 Pandemic hit. The United States and the world, for that matter, hadn't seen a global pandemic like it in over a century. States locked down, people lost their jobs, businesses shuttered and yet, the Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness Center, known locally, regionally and nationally now, as "SVB" was set to open, more or less at the height of the pandemic.

"There's no doubt it was a stressful time for us," Collard said. "It was a scary time for sure, we weren't sure how long it was going to last."

By late spring, the state was in lockdown. Schools went on-line and the screws on businesses turned tighter. Construction at SVB was forging ahead. They were on the clock, anticipating an early fall opening. The prospects were dim.

"Prior to opening, people were telling me I was crazy, why I chose to build SVB in Zephyrhills, everything was shutting down and we had no members," Collard said.

From March 30 to Sept. 1, SVB had exactly zero memberships. By the time of their soft opening on Sept. 21, they had just 15.

"Membership was the most scary thing," Collard said. "Our business model was based on 400 members and we had 15."

Collard brought in a business partner, Andy Sorrentino,

who moved to Florida from Philadelphia that June. SVB went ahead with the grand opening on Oct. 11 but they would have to come up with something besides memberships to keep the ship from sinking.

"We had to reinvent ourselves, quickly," Collard said.

Collard and SVB started an academy for kids. They were expecting 12, they now have 50. They had made arrangements to bring in a local coffee shop and cafe. The Wesley Chapel location went under and SVB elected to go with a more expansive menu with the option to cater big events. That led to the introduction of Vesh, who Collard touts as the, "best caterer from Tampa." Now Sunday brunches are always packed.

Massage therapy at SVB had a sluggish start. It had no customers for the first several weeks. Now it's fully-booked and SVB has since hired a second massage therapist.

Collard and SVB had to make some tough decisions. They struck out, expanded when a more conservative voice might say to hunker down. Collard is not one to hunker down.

The facility already had hard and clay tennis courts and had the footprint in place for grass tennis courts, meant to emulate the Wimbledon playing surface; much like the hard and clay courts were designed to mimic the US Open and French Open surfaces, respectively. Instead, Collard and SVB called an audible and put in a beach where the grass was set to go. This opened up both beach volleyball and beach tennis.

Beach volleyball is a popular sport in the South and 53 colleges play it. There are no public courts in the area and usually one has to hit up the beach to find a net and enough sand to play on. Not only does SVB now offer it, they are opening it up in classic Collard fashion -big. A grand open tournament is already scheduled for this coming August.



Above: The main entrance at Sarah Vande Berg Tennis Center.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SVB

So after a few fits and starts, SVB is roaring, zooming ahead. A \$4.6 million state appropriation is coming in to buttress a \$15 million investment in a 26,000-square-foot indoor facility, on a 10-acre parcel on Simons Road, across from SVB. Collard expects this facility to support volleyball, basketball but also double as indoor event space and even a concert venue.

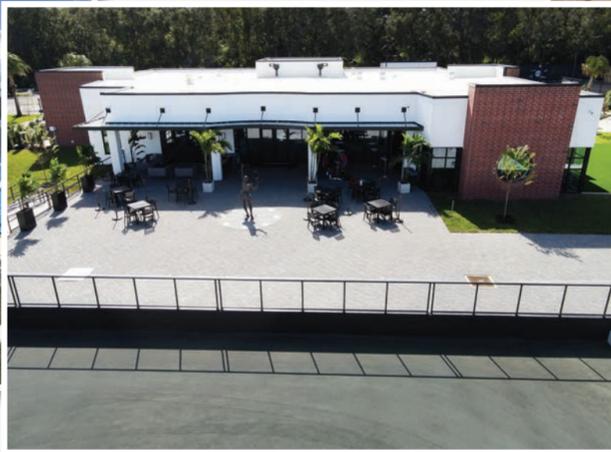
Cryotherapy and the salt room were part of the initial plan but now SVB is adding Neurofeedback and Biofeedback, an interactive computer system that helps athletes and non-athletes achieve peak performance training and overall mental wellness. Just last week, they added on-site IV service, where people can get the nutrients and hydration they need intravenously.

Five days ago, SVB completed a purchase of 30 acres of property in what they are calling Phase III. It's to-be-determined what exactly the use for the parcel, just a five-minute walk from the clubhouse, will be but Collard says, "ideas are welcome." SVB is now closing in on 200 memberships. While it's attracted athletes and non-athletes from all over the world, cultivating the local population is the next step.



Above: The quirky-looking padel courts host one of the fastest-growing sports in the country.

Below: Drone photo from the courtyard of the Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness Center.



Above: Aerial photo of SVB when the grass tennis court was still in play.

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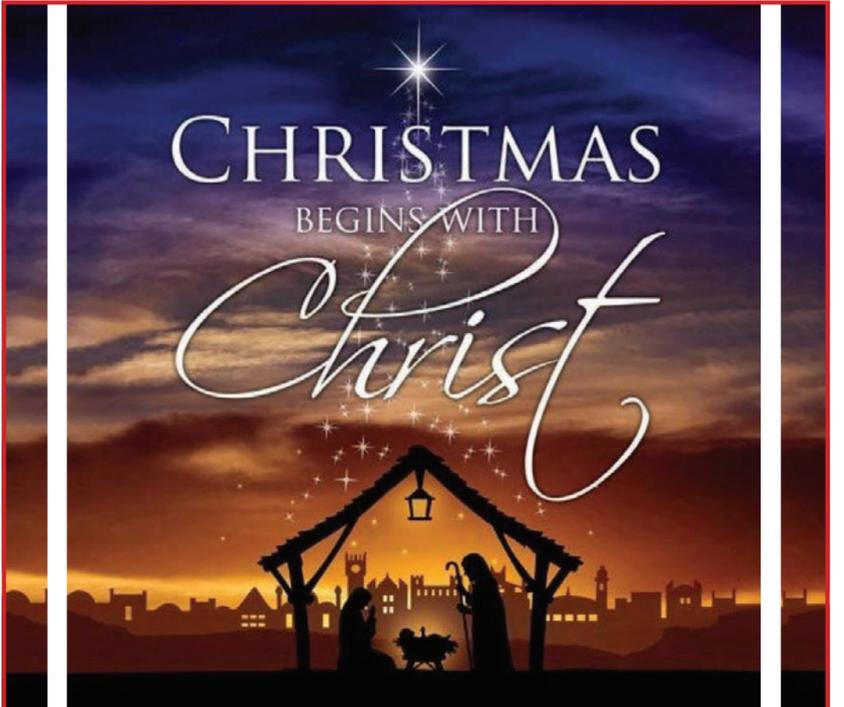
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# Got lawn? Reclaimed water expanding in Zephyrhills

*It's been around since 2003 but options for residences and businesses to utilize reclaimed water are expanding*

By Andy Warrener  
August 5, 2021

Got lawn? Don't want to pay \$2.41 per 1,000 gallons of water to keep it up? Look into bringing in reclaimed water. Reclaimed water goes for 32 cents per 1,000 gallons for properties less than one acre. That rate drops to just 18 cents per 1,000 gallons for properties larger than one acre. If you've seen the pinkish-purple signs or the same color water main pipes, there's a good chance that reclaimed water is being used in that area.

The City of Zephyrhills went online with reclaimed water in 2003, when it obtained a Southwest Florida Management District (SWFMD) grant to help the wastewater treatment facility on Alston Avenue run a reclaimed water pipeline, the pinkish-purple PVC pipe, all the way to the corner of CR 54 and Wire Road. From there, the city has continued to add sections of pipe as well as access valves along the way.

Large properties have been able to benefit from the use of reclaimed water. The Zephyrhills Municipal Golf Course has been using reclaimed water, almost since it became available and Zephyrhills Utilities Director John Bostic estimated that the facility uses about 10 million gallons per month, depending on seasonal rainfall. The proximity of the golf course and of nearby Krusen Field made both locations prime users of the reclaimed water. Zephyrhills High School, as well as Stewart Middle School use reclaimed water for their athletic fields.

Developments came in and the city added pink pipelines. The Abbott Park Development on the north side of town is even

further expanding the reclaimed water network. The city is furnishing half the expense, while SWFMD is furnishing the other half to run a line where it can be accessed at the development.

"Abbott Park will be the first major development to have full reclaimed water," Bostic said.

Bringing the line that far north will also allow for access by the Scotland Yard Golf Course.

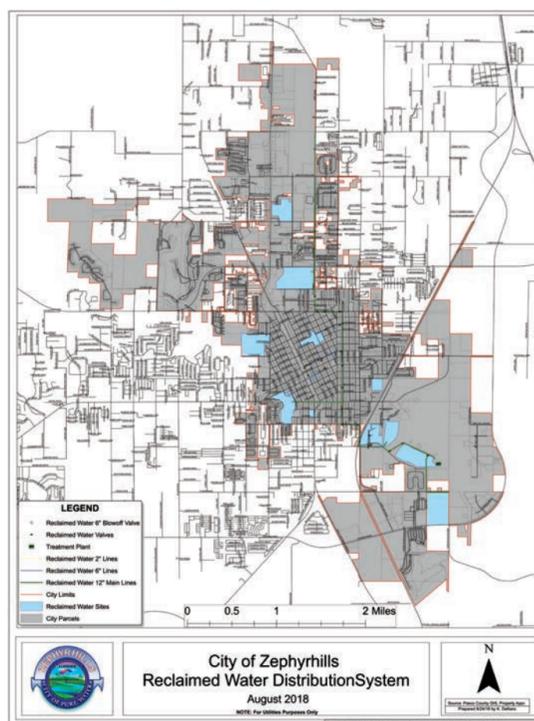
Golf courses and athletic fields have thirsty fields to water but what about the average homeowner? As it turns out, there's an avenue to bring reclaimed water to your house. A prospective resident would come to the building department and provide details about their residence. From there, the building department establishes how far the residence is away from a reclaimed line. A cost-to-connect estimate is derived and if the individual wants the reclaimed water, they can pay the cost estimate. This cost can run high, especially in light of a surge in material costs but residents can also band together to tamp down the cost. For instance, it might be cost prohibitive for one person to pay to run a line to their home. Yet, if several or even dozens of adjacent residents all want the service, it defrays the cost significantly.

"We encourage people to come together to apply," Bostic said. "We want to help people as much as possible but we also aren't going to do work that people can do for themselves."

One added benefit to using reclaimed water is that there is no sewer meterage for using it. While city residents pay for municipal water and sewer, the reclaimed water is spread on the lawn and thus does not incur sewer metering fees.

Reclaimed water usage is expanding nationwide, as well as in Zephyrhills. In 2003, when the program began, the city pumped 75,266,000 into the reclaimed system. In 2020, that number rose to 111,069,000. Most new developments are required to use reclaimed water for irrigation purposes. As the city continues to grow and as more current residences and businesses adopt it, the demand will continue to grow proportionately. Bostic says that the Alston Plant can handle it.

"(5 or 10 years in the future) I expect every drop of reclaimed water from our Wastewater Treatment Facility to be used in a beneficial manner," Bostic said. "Our current limitations are based on our customers' usage of the wastewater system. Our plant is designed to treat 3.85 million gallons per day and we currently only use about 1.8 million (less than half) of that capacity."



Above: A map of Zephyrhills city limits showing where the reclaimed water pipes are and are planned for.

Below: Next to the treatment facility is a reclaimed water filling station.



Above: The wastewater treatment facility off Alston Avenue.

Right: Zephyrhills City Hall utilizes reclaimed water.  
ANDY WARRENER




# D.A.B. default affects East Pasco County but not municipal Zephyrhills

*The mega-contractor that was working on the diverging diamond at SR 54 and I-75 has halted progress on that and other road projects in Pasco County*

By Andy Warrener  
August 12, 2021

No D.A.B. projects are in Zephyrhills City Limits but two projects in particular are going to affect Zephyrhills and East Pasco County residents. The two projects in question are the SR56 at I-75 Diverging Diamonds, as well as the widening of SR54 between Curley Road and Eiland Boulevard.

The first one to go was the SR56/I-75 Project or T7412. As far back as November of 2020, the FDOT issued a Notice of Intent to Default to D.A.B. By July 1 of 2021, the FDOT declared D.A.B. in default. Diverging Diamond sounds like a great idea. It takes the left turns out of any intersection, accelerating the traffic signal changes for east-westbound and north-southbound traffic. Anyone that attempts to take on SR 56 any time near rush hour knows they are in for a stop-and-go battle. Improvements were being made. The orange barrels were up and "road closed" signs emerged but the project stalled. D.A.B.'s contention was that design errors by the FDOT impacted the project's schedule and cost.

Despite the existence of significant errors in the project design provided by FDOT and the recommendation of an independent Disputes Review Board that upheld D.A.B.'s contentions

regarding the existence of the design errors and the resulting impact to the project schedule and costs to complete, FDOT has declared D.A.B. in default," wrote Debora and William Bachschmidt, president and vice president of D.A.B. Constructors in their statement.

Regardless, the project is stalled and D.A.B. is out. What happens next is the project goes into what is called a Surety Bond, a contract between three parties - the bond holder, the contractor (DAB) and the FDOT. Performance bonds that include the three parties, are usually a requirement to bid for a state or local contract.

"The City of Zephyrhills requires contractors to get a performance bond to bid on city projects," Zephyrhills City Manager William Poe Jr. said. "When the contractor fails to meet the performance bond, everything gets put on hold but you still have to find a company to finish the work."

That's where the SR56/I-75 Project is right now. The Surety for the project has requested bids be submitted on Aug. 12. From there, the FDOT will select the winning bid and work will resume. It's hard to put any sort of timeline together until the new contract is awarded.

"We are very happy to be able to watch this one from the sidelines," Poe said.

The other project, the widening of SR 54 between Curley and Eiland continues and faces the same challenge, that of finding a new contractor to complete the work. The latter project may affect more residents of Zephyrhills, as it is closer to city limits and there are some alternatives to crossing over I-75 at SR56, unfortunately, SR54 is one of them. Both projects, as inconvenient as they might be, are not enforcing closures. Eiland Boulevard was cut off at SR54 last week but has opened up again for access. Nevertheless, both project delays are likely to cause hassles for Zephyrhills residents.

"It's definitely affecting our residents," Zephyrhills Public Works Director Shane LeBlanc said. "I really felt sorry for the more-or-less 400 employees who got laid off. That's horrible."

D.A.B. does not and has not had any contracts with the City of Zephyrhills. LeBlanc said that they did bid on one project but that they were not the low bidder. Zephyrhills tends to go with smaller contracting companies that do most of the work themselves. This is likely to insulate city projects from major defaults like D.A.B.'s.

"This is why we have that bonding requirement, the process and protection are there for the owner if needs be," LeBlanc said. "Also, when smaller companies bid on projects, they have less overhead and perform a lot of the work themselves, instead of subcontracting it out. This helps keep down costs."

It's an uncertain time in the industry. Cost of goods are soaring and there is an intense labor shortage. It's no surprise that there are casualties. The projects will eventually pick back up again. It's just a matter of who will pick them up and when.



Above: Eastbound view of State Road 56 crossing over I-75.



Above: View from State Road 54 looking west of the widening project.

Below: Eastbound view of State Road 56 crossing over I-75.



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# ZPD taking drugs off the streets

*Drug seizures are on the rise in Zephyrhills thanks to the exemplary work of a special unit*

By Steve Lee  
August 26, 2021

While many traffic stops by the Zephyrhills Police Department often result in minimal infractions or warnings, some are anything but routine. One such stop last month yielded a substantial amount of drugs, specifically 70 grams of methamphetamine and a small amount of cocaine.

That is just one example of how the ZPD is dealing with overdoses and drugs with seizures on the rise of late within the city limits.

Those numbers have been added to the statistics for this year so far. Since January the department has collectively seized 577 articles of narcotics or paraphernalia. That includes more than 1,300 grams of methamphetamine, almost 60 grams of Fentanyl and nearly 40 grams of cocaine, as well as 1,424 pills of various kinds.

"A lot of the credit does need to go to the special response team, but it is a collaborative effort and we're focusing on getting (drugs) out of the city," said Derek Brewer, the city's police chief.

That amount of Fentanyl taken off the streets potentially could kill around 60,000 people. So far in 2021, the city is on track to exceed last year's drug overdoses by 14 percent. For his part, Brewer is issuing a call-to-action for Zephyrhills residents due to the recent spike in drug overdose related deaths.

"I'm proud of the tremendous work our officers continue to do getting dangerous narcotics off the streets of Zephyrhills," the chief said. "However, we recognize that enforcement is not the only way to combat drug addictions. We encourage our residents to take advantage of local addiction resources.

"We are the enforcement arm and will continue to enforce the laws, while reminding our community members that there are services available for those who want help," Brewer continued. "We don't want to have to notify anyone else's next-of-kin about a fatal overdose."

Aside from the special response team the local police department always has had help from the K-9 unit, which currently consists of officer Lorenzo Limoges and his dog Bolt, along with officer Morris Sparkman and his canine partner Jax.

"They play a big role," Brewer said, acknowledging the vital contributions made by the officers and their police dogs. "I think we're making an impact."

Two local officers who no longer are part of the canine unit but had been for numerous years are Joe Rinaldo and Billy Adams.

Rinaldo, who also has been the boys and girls weightlifting coach at various times at Zephyrhills High, had Gunner and Mako. He most recently lost Mako last year. Adams worked for a long time with Jenko.

"I think we're attacking it better now than we have," Rinaldo said of pursuing drug dealers and coming through with arrests and prosecutions. "It's driving the sellers out of the city. If it wasn't for me and Billy working (with the dogs) you wouldn't have the success they have now."

"We set the bar and they raised it," he said, alluding to the current teams on the K-9 unit. "That's the way it should be."



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY ZEPHYRHILLS POLICE DEPARTMENT



Left: Shown with Bolt the police dog is a wide array of drugs, money, weapons and paraphernalia recently confiscated during arrests and seizures by the Zephyrhills Police Department.



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# Eagles finally get their downtown grand opening

Below: Member Eddie Shaw sits on his Harley Davidson Softail in front of the downtown building.

5th Avenue site has been home to the Fraternal Order of Eagles Aeries 3752 since relocation from Wesley Chapel in spring of 2020

By Steve Lee  
September 2, 2021

The Fraternal Order of Eagles Aeries 3752 have been downtown since taking over the former Wells Fargo Bank building in the spring of 2020. After a few stops and starts, primarily due to the on-and-off again presence of the coronavirus pandemic and a recent resurgence, the non-profit charitable organization finally got its grand opening.

Last Thursday, it became official as members were joined by city leaders and local dignitaries to celebrate with a traditional ribbon-cutting as well as words of appreciation from a handful of notable speakers. They came together at the renovated 10,000-square-foot building.

"On behalf of the city we just want to say we're very happy to have you downtown," said Todd Vande Berg, the city's planner who showed up with city manager Billy Poe and city clerk Lori Hillman.

"This is everything; people helping people. I love it," said John Hierons, a trustee and past president who has been part of the local chapter for 20 years.

The local chapter, along with the accompanying Ladies Auxiliary, has been in the east Pasco area for five decades. It incorporated in 1977.

The renovation of an abandoned downtown building was completed in three stages. The FOP Aeries 3752 had been in a building off State Road 54 and across from the New River Branch Library in Wesley Chapel, just beyond city limits. That site has since been bulldozed.

"This here is bringing us into Zephyrhills," trustee Reed Sutton said.

Eddie Shaw, a longtime member who helped pressure wash the outside area during the early stages of renovating the property, pulled up front on his 2014 Harley Davidson Softail to join in the celebration. He often parks his motorcycle out front.

Tim Hoyt, the Eagles Grand Aerie Membership Coordinator based in Ohio, came down for the ceremony and following party. He congratulated John Daff, chapter president as well as being president of the local Eagle Riders, and Linda Vest, the Ladies Auxiliary president, for their efforts in leading the local chapter.

"People helping people," is what Hoyt and the others emphasized during last week's event, which he labeled a "rebirth" for the local chapter.

Hoyt, who said, "I'm blessed to go around and help people," emphasized that 100 percent of money raised for charities actually goes to those charities with no hidden or administrative costs.

Hoyt thanked city leadership "for helping us get to this point. For believing in us and giving us the opportunity to continue donating to the Zephyrhills and Wesley Chapel communities."

"The city has been a godsend," Hierons said. "They wanted us here. We've helped them revitalize the downtown area."

Another notable element favoring the local chapter is that being more a part of the city has led to more and younger people entering the building and joining.

"We get more of the younger generation here," said Sutton, comparing the downtown building to the previous location several miles to the west. "Everybody comes downtown."

"A lot of professionals are coming into the club," added Pat Hochstetler, coordinator for the auxiliary.

Daff noted how many longtime members showed up for last week's event.

"We are family in this building," he said. The local Eagles have numerous activities on a weekly basis. Their calendar includes pool tournaments, darts, karaoke, bingo, card games and live music.



STEVE LEE

Above: John Daff and Linda Vest were joined by Tim Hoyt, Grand Aerie Membership Coordinator, at the symbolic eagle behind the building.

Left: Daff and Vest were among the organization's leaders who spoke at the event.



Above: Fraternal Order of Eagles Aeries 3752 leaders and members were joined by local dignitaries and city leaders for the ribbon-cutting.

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# Projects under way in city and outlying areas

*Drive-thru car wash near Walmart, expanding Simons Road and repaving Wire Road are among new city projects with Taco Bell just beyond city limits now open*

By Steve Lee  
September 23, 2021

With a nearly \$75 million city budget that city manager Billy Poe expects to be approved by the end of this month, there are several projects in the city limits and outlying areas already under way or starting soon.

While it is in the early stages, a full-service, drive-thru car wash near Walmart at U.S. 301 and Pretty Pond Road could be close to getting under way. Todd Vande Berg, the city's planner, said there are preliminary site plans for that project.

Including the planned car wash, Vande Berg noted that there are four parcels on about 10 acres with that area zoned for commercial-retail development.

"It's more room than you think," he said, adding that the new traffic signal at Pretty Pond Road and U.S. 301 make that area more attractive for retail development.

Vande Berg and Shane LeBlanc, the city's public works director, mentioned the second phase of Simons Road is a few months away from getting started. It is designed to connect Fort King Road to Eiland Boulevard.

The first phase paved a two-lane road from Eiland Boulevard down past the new Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness Center and hooked around the back of the golf course at the Silverado Golf & Country Club. That part of the project was completed in 2019.

"It will be a nice cut-through," LeBlanc said of the second phase upon completion.

Abbott Square, a new subdivision just north of the golf course, already is being built.

"They're getting ready out there," Vande Berg said. "That's Lenar (the builder) and they're a well-oiled machine."

Vande Berg, whose late daughter the tennis center is named after, also expects work to begin soon on two projects out there. Plans call for 100 dormitory units for student-athletes who would study and hone their skills in various sports at the center. The dormitories are



Above: Dump trucks on Wire Road line up as part of a repaving project.

Below: Taco Bell, across from the Home Depot and east of the New River Ranch Library, will open soon.

planned to be built on the south side of the main parking lot.

Another project planned for SVB is an indoor sports facility on that property.

"It's becoming more and more of an economic driver," Vande Berg said. "It's bringing business to the city."

Additionally, while there had been tentative discussions for an Aldi near Walmart, Vande Berg noted that project for a quality food store is unlikely to come to fruition.

"That went through foreclosure and another developer got a hold of it," he said. "Being that Aldi wasn't a done deal there wasn't any contractual agreement."

As for the outlying areas of Pasco County, a Taco Bell recently opened near the Home Depot, just west of the New River Branch Library and east of city limits and the intersection of State Road 54 and Eiland Boulevard/Morris Bridge Road.

In another project being overseen by various county departments, Wire Road is being repaved. Vande Berg noted that the two-lane road will be widened by about three feet on each side of the right-of-way.



STEVE LEE



Above: Work along Simons Road continues. That road will eventually be connected to Fort King Road.



Above: A new traffic light at the intersection of Gall Boulevard fronts land being cleared for a drive-thru car wash.

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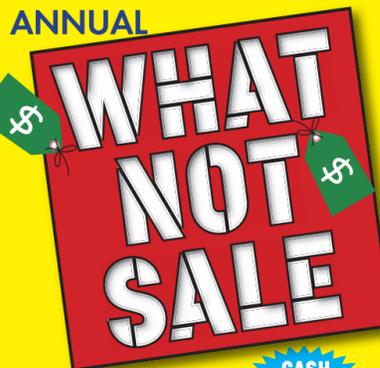
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# Two Rivers community gets the green light

*Pasco County Commission unanimously approves plans for large development in east and central Pasco*

By Steve Lee  
September 30, 2021



Above: Four lanes, including two for turns, are shown along SR 56 at the Morris Bridge Road intersection.

Two Rivers, a master-planned community encompassing large areas of east and central Pasco, has been given the green light. Last week in Dade City, the Pasco County Commission unanimously approved rezoning for the extensive development, giving the go-ahead to move from proposal and comprehensive plans to the early stages of construction.

"The motion passes 5-0," said Ron Oakley, the commission's chairman.

The project, 12 years in the making, will be built along State Road 56 and extend from U.S. 301 to Morris Bridge Road, which clearly impacts Zephyrhills and the outlying areas to the south and east. Setting the stage for the development just south of the Pasco-Hillsborough line was the four-lane extension with additional turn lanes of SR 56 in 2019. Traffic signals are at Morris Bridge Road and U.S. 301.

It is earmarked for a 3,405-acre community that will include 6,400 residential units, schools (high, middle and elementary), 246 conservation acres with an extensive trail system and an 80-acre district park with spaces for multi-purpose fields, an aquatics center, playgrounds, a dog park, along with courts for tennis and basketball.

Additionally, projected are numerous parcels for retail and industrial land usage. Additional plans call for a potential library and public safety site for the Pasco Sheriff's Office and Pasco Fire Rescue.

The acreage has primarily been zoned for agriculture but that needed to change for the developmental plans. Commissioners, following approval of county staff, giving the okay to rezone 3,405 acres is just the latest in a sequence



Above: The intersection of U.S. 301 and State Road 56 surely will get busier as plans get under way for the Two Rivers community. Above inset: A sign lets drivers know that U.S. 301 is ahead.

of governmental approvals.

Clarke Hobby, an attorney who spoke on behalf of the Eisenhower Property Group and Thomas family, noted that Bob Sierra had the site under contact as far back as 2008. There have been several owners along the way.

"We believe that this project has been done the right way," he said. "One of the biggest things you have to remember about Two Rivers is that it truly is a mixed-use project. It's been set up correctly from the get-go."

Hobby added that the site could contain up to 2.6 million employment-generated usage.

"We're not short-changing it," he said. "We're going to create a log of jobs along the way in addition to making an overall great community."

Some county residents voiced their disapproval about growth and development, along

with school zones and traffic. Hobby, however, informed commissioners that "we'll make sure that there's adequate east-west connections."

While the project clearly is beyond city limits, city manager Billy Poe views it as a boost to the entire area, especially Zephyrhills.

"Higher end homes are being built along that 56 corridor," he said, adding that plans call for another subdivision near State Road 56 along the east side of U.S. 301. "As that growth comes this way we're hoping it will spread."

Two Rivers, Poe said, "is not in the city limits, but it's close enough that it will support all the businesses within the city. From 56 and 301 you can be downtown within five minutes. It's not inconceivable that when (future residents of those planned homes) come out of their subdivisions they can come into town and shop."

Poe also noted that rather than drive to Wesley Chapel for goods and services, people could come to Zephyrhills for restaurants, auto shops or places like the Zephyrhills Brewery. Another attraction to get people in Two Rivers coming to Zephyrhills would be the activities at the venue near the city's airport and events such as downtown parades.



Above: A car drives through the intersection of SR 56 and Morris Bridge Road.

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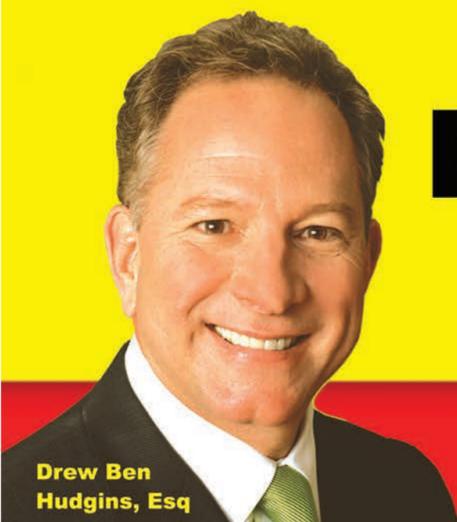
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# Progress being made on veterans clinic



Above: The front facade is worked on during construction of the new veterans clinic.

*New facility in Zephyrhills is targeting for a spring opening and will provide more services to local veterans*

By Steve Lee

October 7, 2021

Lawrence Migliara, managing partner for SL2 Consulting, noted that once construction is completed that equipment should be able to be moved in soon afterward.

"We're getting ready to complete the facade (out front) and getting ready to finish the interior," he said.

Upon completion, the 14,000-square-foot facility will be handicapped accessible and offer podiatry, physical therapy with up to 10 exam rooms for primary care and as many as a half-dozen rooms for mental health. Additional services include women's health, lab areas, telehealth, and pharmacy services.

State Senator of District 20 Danny Burgess, a Zephyrhills High graduate and former city mayor, is a strong advocate for veterans. The former member of the Florida House of

Representatives was once the executive director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. He also has served time in the U.S. Army Reserves.

"I'm very encouraged by the progress of the VA facility in Zephyrhills," said Burgess, who is now a Wesley Chapel resident. "It means that our local veterans will not have to make long trips to see their doctor, in addition to the jobs this facility will bring. This project helps demonstrate that we are a growing, vibrant community that I am proud to call home."

Several prominent veterans in the area spoke well of the new building, who like Burgess are well aware of just how much it means to have better and more services available without having to drive to Tampa to visit the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital. That facility is near the University of South Florida's main campus.

Cliff Moffett, president of the Zephyrhills Military History Museum adjacent to the Zephyrhills Municipal Airport, feels that the new building is something that has been needed locally for quite some time.

"Just the traffic," said Moffett, who served in the U.S. Navy in 1983-86 and later in the Navy Reserves. "People don't want to have to drive to Tampa. You know how much of a plus this is to have it in our area and with all the veterans we have? It's definitely a huge plus."

Longtime local Rotarian and former city councilman Manny Funes also is among the veterans in the area who will appreciate the new facility being opened soon. Funes, who

served in the U.S. Air Force, expressed his opinion on how much the clinic is needed.

"You've got a number of veterans in the area," he said. "It's going to be a real convenience for all the veterans."

As far as city planner Todd Vande Berg is concerned, the location selected for the new facility could not have been better. City officials and local developers, he reasons, envision the intersection of Eiland Boulevard and U.S. 301 as a thriving area. In recent years, a Wawa and Culver's have opened on U.S. 301, just south of that juncture.

"I feel it's a strong location," Vande Berg said. "That intersection is kind of the geographic center of the city."

Vande Berg also recognized the importance of having a VA facility closer to home for the local veterans.

"Obviously, it's great that we can have something for the veterans," he said.

In addition to the veterans clinic, Migliara said SL2 is building a retail outlet adjacent to the CVS and to the north.

"It's an additional out-parcel on that property," he said.

That retail/commercial building could have 3-4 outlets, Migliara added. No timetable was given for the completion of that building.

Progress is being made on a new building for the veterans clinic, which is located off Eiland Boulevard just east of U.S. 301. It is targeted to open sometime later in the spring.



Above: A view from the east side of the new veterans clinic off Eiland Boulevard in Zephyrhills indicates the ongoing construction work.



Above: The veterans clinic is expected to open in the spring of 2022.

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# Economic Summit portends major growth and expansion

*The summit brought familiar faces and some not so familiar but all talking up the economic potential of the city and surrounding area*

By Andy Warrener  
October 21, 2021

Zephyrhills City Manager William Poe Jr. welcomed the speakers and audience to the Oct. 13 event. The first part of the meeting was titled, "City of Zephyrhills - Growth & Expansion." Poe would actually be the first speaker. He talked up the \$10 million the city received in grants over the past three years and highlighted some of the projects at the Zephyrhills Municipal Airport (ZMA). Two box hangers at \$1 million each, a taxiway to the F Terminal and runway extension were projects already underway at the airport.

Next up was Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC) Economic Development Planner Harry Walsh addressing the audience via video call streamed into the room. Walsh brought up a topic that's becoming more and more common at city council meetings, that of "Industry Clusters." Walsh detailed the TBRPC's recent Aviation Cluster Study and how it could benefit the area. The ZMA is a General Aviation airport, meaning it accommodates most flight activity except, "big commercial and cargo planes" according to Walsh. He pointed out that while Covid-19 severely curtailed commercial airline traffic, general aviation remained, "mostly steady" and had already reached the type of traffic seen since before the pandemic.

"General aviation has been mostly fine and ZMA is well-situated for development," Walsh said. Walsh wrapped his presentation touting "Aviation Clusters," meaning connected businesses all in one area - restaurants

for employees to eat at, distribution centers near manufacturing - that type of thing. He cited a study in Duval County, where Jacksonville is located, as having produced a great deal of revenue and dozens, if not hundreds of jobs.

Zephyrhills Planning Director Todd Vande Berg was next to speak. Vande Berg spoke about the importance of planning and how it related to the rampant growth in East Pasco County and Zephyrhills.

"We have important decisions to make to ensure resiliency and ensure the economic base for the community is solid," Vande Berg said.

He spoke of updates to the City's Comprehensive Plan moving forward and of an "Industrial Corridor" city planners hope to develop and cultivate. Vande Berg went on to discuss the city's historical value and touted the CRA.

"We want to create a vision that has goals and reflects a broad base of community interest," Vande Berg said.

Vande Berg then went on to use as examples some of the larger municipal projects already underway, like the 7th Street improvements, the intersection of Simons Road and Eiland Boulevard, as well as the State Road 56 extension. The list continued with mention of the Dairy Road extension, the US 301 and Pretty Pond improvements, the Abbott Square development, Simons Property, Trotter's Crossing, Zephyr Commons Apartments, 15th Avenue townhomes, among others.

Next was president of CBD Real Estate Investment David Waronker, chiming in via video call. Waronker touted the 20 years of business and the development of 20 properties in Zephyrhills.

"There is so much more that we want to give back to the city," Waronker said.

He quantified it by stating that CBD provided eight full-time scholarships last year but did not specify just what kind of scholarships they were. He stated that one of the big needs was both hotels and quality rental apartments.

Vice President of Marketing for Metro Development Group Vaikie O'Grady spoke about the rapid sales of homes in the Abbott Park/Zephyr Lakes Development, as well as the solar street lights.

Dr. Randy Stovall, the Chairman of ZEDC and the Zephyrhills Chamber of Commerce, followed. Stovall revealed highlights from the recent Biz Walk, the first of its kind since 2014. He noted that 57 businesses completed surveys about their experience in Zephyrhills.

"It's a way to take the pulse of the business community," Stovall said.

Some of the statistics pointed out were that: the average business had been in the



Above: Pasco County Commissioner Ron Oakley was last to take the podium at the economic summit.

ANDY WARRENER

area for at least 20 years, 75 percent said they had difficulty finding quality employees and that 49 percent had plans to hire people. Stovall pointed out the two PHSC campuses in the county and nearby universities of Saint Leo and South Florida.

Tom Ryan and Turner Arbour of the Pasco Economic Development Council (PEDC) spoke about large tracts of developable land near the ZMA, and how they are being talked about at the top levels of the State government. They continued to discuss the area and its potential connectivity to major roads and highways. They continued on about job creation, although the cited study listed: sales, office administration and food service as the top three occupations in the area. This brought out an earlier comment by Melissa Parks from Habitat for Humanity, stating that a person needs to make \$20 per hour to afford an apartment in Pasco County. She went on to state that one-third of created jobs in Pasco County made less than \$20 per hour.

Last to take the podium was Pasco County Commissioner Ron Oakley. Oakley touted many of the municipal projects in the county, such as the paving of Wire Road, improvements on State Road 54 East, the Diverging Diamonds at I-75 and State Road 56 - recently back underway after a stall when the contractor defaulted. Oakley went on to detail future projects like the realignment of State Road 52 and the rebuilding of Lacochee. He also spoke of the small business boom and the opening of the Wesley Chapel District Park Recreational Complex.

Wrapping up the meeting, State Senator Danny Burgess dropped in via conference call, while in Tallahassee. He spoke of the excitement in the state capitol about East Pasco County and Zephyrhills. He spoke of the National Guard coming to the area and how it would be a "big economic driver." Lastly, he praised the efforts of local politician and Senate President Wilton Simpson.



Above: Zephyrhills Planning Director Todd Vande Berg addresses the audience at the Oct. 13 economic summit.

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# Council meeting greenlights Hercules Park, red lights the movie theatre

ANDY WARRENER

*Monday's meeting moved one big project forward and put another on pause, for now*

By Andy Warrener  
October 28, 2021

Consent Agenda items opened up the meeting after an invocation and Pledge of Allegiance. First item was an approval of the Sept. 27 regular meeting minutes and passed 5-0. In the minutes was a form, a Memorandum of Voting Conflict filled out by councilman Lance Smith detailing his recusing himself from certain votes regarding property developments adjacent to the Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness Center. Smith is a SVB Foundation board member and has faithfully and voluntarily recused himself from votes. The Memorandum of Voting Conflict put it down in ink.

Second item asked council to approve a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Pasco County in developing an Opioid Task Force. Pasco County entered into a MOU with the State of Florida to become a Qualified County to receive funding to help fight the opioid epidemic. The MOU requires Pasco County to create a local Task Force that includes a representative from Pasco County Fire Rescue, Pasco County Schools, Pasco County Sheriff, Pasco County Public Services, two municipalities, Pasco Health Department, two people with subject matter expertise, the Chief Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit, Pasco Alliance for Substance Abuse, and a retired subject matter expert. The task force will have a voice in the creation of an abatement plan to identify current programs and strategies being used to

address the opioid epidemic and provide treatment to the citizens, and to effectively allocate any regional settlement funds received by Pasco County. The Task Force will meet at least quarterly to study and analyze data related to the opioid epidemic and evaluate existing and future uses of any settlement funds recovered by litigation. Chief Brewer will be the city representative on the task force.

Council to approve a resolution for city council to participate in a joint meeting of the Municipal Association of Pasco in order to discuss matters of mutual interest. The joint meeting with the Municipal Association of Pasco is scheduled for Nov. 4, 6:30 p.m. at Catches Waterfront Grille, 7811 Bayview St. in Port Richey. All three items were bundled together and approved 5-0 by council vote.

In Business Items, an approval of a street resurfacing piggyback agreement with Asphalt Paving Systems, Inc. of Lee County. The city has 24 different sections of roadway scheduled for repaving in the FY 2021-22 Budget. The projects performed by Asphalt Paving Systems, Inc. should not exceed \$598,572.07. There is \$600,000 earmarked in the 2021-22 FY Budget for the city for repaving.

"Piggybacking with another entity buys you time," Zephyrhills City Manager William Poe Jr. said. "Lee County has already done a spec sheet, the bid package, they've done all that. When you piggyback with someone like that, it can save you six months."

Council's approval of Hercules Park construction documents and a Scope of Services to be performed by Kimley-Horn and Associates was next up. The scope includes creation of the construction documents, permitting, surveying, architectural design, and construction phase services for the implementation of park elements as shown on the Hercules Park Master Plan approved by the city council and dated Aug. 31. Scope of Services totals \$292,985, which is within 10 percent of the Opinion of Probable Cost with Alternates at \$3,386,630.

A Concept Design was shown during the meeting, provoking some conversation from the dais. One of the topics was the \$250,000 estimated cost of installing the restrooms at the park. Councilman Ken Burgess had some sticker shock at the estimated price, "that's going to be one heck of a bathroom."

Poe stipulated that they had originally budgeted \$350,000 for the bathrooms and also said that the bathroom installed downtown in 2006, ran roughly \$170,000. More discussion revolved around the BMX bike path and how it occupied so much of the park, while not being a complementary activity to picnicking and trail walking. Councilman Burgess brought up the notion



Above: Dr. Randy Stovall touts the recent success at the ZEDC Economic Summit.

of including security cameras. Ultimately, council did vote 5-0 to allow Kimley-Horn and Associates to comprise a Scope of Services.

Next item is to simply move the Nov. 22 meeting to Nov. 29 as it passed 5-0.

Last item started a conversation about what to do with the movie theatre on Main Street. For several years, conversations have been had regarding the revival of the old home theatre. Staff recently had discussions with both the property owner and Senator Burgess regarding the possibility of the city acquiring and renovating the buildings. Staff will ask for state appropriations to acquire and renovate the property.

However, before a request can be made, the city must obtain an appraisal of the property. The cost of the appraisal is \$3,600. There was doubt that an appraisal could be completed in time to submit it to the state. The Nov. 17 deadline made it a non-starter. Furthermore, the city already has a number of projects in the works and taking on renovating the movie theatre seemed a bridge too far for every council member. There was talk of how nice it would be and how it would attract more foot traffic downtown but ultimately it seemed like taking on too much for city staff. Moving forward with the appraisal was voted down 5-0.

In Citizen Comments, Dr. Randy Stovall touted the success of the recent Economic Summit. He spoke of the turnout, the content of the meeting and hit on its high points.

In city council comments, Poe mentioned the Zephyrhills High School Homecoming Parade, set for 4:30 p.m. this Thursday, downtown. Councilwoman Jodi Wilkeson mentioned the Halloween Howl on Saturday from 4 to 9 p.m.



Left: Concept design and potential amenities at the future Hercules Park.

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