



PRFSC March 14,2019 Meeting Minutes

On Thursday March 14,2019 PRFSC hosted Polk County Commissioner Martha Santiago as speaker for a 'Meet and Great' town hall meeting. Commissioner Santiago brought to the meeting Polk County Deputy County Manager Bill Beasley and Polk County Director of Roads and Drainage Jay Jarvis.

Commissioner Santiago opened the meeting by providing a bit of her background. She is a longtime resident of Polk County. She is married with two adult children and four grandchildren. She has a background in private business and public service teaching. She is familiar with Poinciana, having served as the school Principal when Sandhill elementary school was first opened on Lake Hatchineha road. More recently she served as Provost (Dean) for Polk Community College. She has always been interested in public service and politics. She first ran for Polk County Commission in the year 2004. She lost that election by 300 votes. After retiring from her job at Polk State she worked for 15 months running for the County Commission seat to represent Poinciana. She makes no promises. She states she is only 1 of 5 votes on the Polk County Commission. She does promise to listen to the needs of her constituents and to represent those needs to Polk County. She then opened up the town hall meeting discussion.

The first topic brought up was transportation. Commissioner Santiago described how she had driven on the Polk County sections of Marigold Ave and Cypress Parkway and understood the need for expansion for both roads. She and her staff described how the commission had approved a combined engineering project to start planning for the construction to expand Marigold to 4 lanes between Palmetto and Cypress Parkway and to expand Cypress Parkway to 4 lanes between Marigold and Poinciana Parkway. They said the county would be

spending \$40M to construct both projects. They expected that the work would be completed within 5 years. She and the county staff stated that in addition to helping to relieve the traffic congestion in Poinciana that the county was focused on making it easier for Polk Poinciana people to get the I4. They described how the county has committed an additional \$28M to expand Lake Wilson Rd from 2 to 4 lanes between Ronald Reagan at the north end of Poinciana Parkway to Osceola County road 532 connecting to I4. In total they identified \$68 million dollars in Polk County transportation improvements for Poinciana. They also discussed the Central Florida Expressway Authority plans for the I4 connector which would directly connect the north end of the Poinciana Parkway to CR 532 and I4.

Comments were made about the frustration that Poinciana Polk drivers have with the congestion on the Osceola side of Poinciana especially Cypress Parkway. Additional comments were made about the problems with signal timings resulting in very long commute times to get through the center of Poinciana. The Polk County officials stated that they meet periodically with their counterparts from Osceola County. They admitted that this was a big problem but stated that they believed Osceola County was trying to address this by asking for tax increases to allow the building of more roads.

The discussion then moved on to additional expansion of Johnson Avenue CR 580 connecting Poinciana to Haines City. The audience asked for the road to be expanded to 4 lanes all the way and for improvements in street lighting. The county said that they were constantly looking at the volume of traffic on the road and at this time the traffic volume did not call for expansion of the road to 4 lanes. They said that they had looked at replacing the 4 way stop intersection at Johnson and Powerline with a roundabout but that the costs for relocation of utility poles located on land not owned by the county would make that cost prohibitive. Instead they are looking at making that a traffic light intersection. There were questions about extending Johnson Avenue across 17/92 to US 27 but they pointed out that in order to do that Haines city would need to pay for the project because it involved City and not county property. They addressed the questions about street lights on Johnson/CR580 by stating that at this time

the area is considered rural and Polk county does not have the budget to add street lights to rural roads.

There was discussion about the possible expansion of SunRail to Haines City and the addition of a bus linking center Poinciana to the Poinciana SunRail station. The commissioner said that there was some talk about expansion of SunRail into Polk County but it is in the very early stages. She said there was discussion about expanding Polk County bus service to provide increased service along the US 27 corridor that might also include addition of bus service connection to the Poinciana SunRail station. She said that the county had approved additional service along the US 27 corridor but had not approved the addition of the new bus link to the Poinciana SunRail station because of lack of funding. She said she would keep trying.

Questions were asked about the road construction in the Posner Park area especially Ernie Caldwell Blvd. People asked why we could not get roads like that built to Poinciana. The answer was that the Posner park area has a special taxing district called a CRA where additional taxes are levied on homes and businesses to pay for infrastructure improvements. Such a taxing structure had been considered for Poinciana but the developer and residents were not willing to pay the increased taxes so as a result Poinciana does not have the nice road and infrastructure that Posner Park has.

The last topic of discussion had to do with police and sheriff protection for Poinciana in Polk County. The county officials stated that the crime rates in the Poinciana area were actually quite lower than other parts of Polk County. It was stated that sheriff response time to calls in Poinciana was quite good. The commissioner offered to bring representatives from the Polk County Sheriff's office to a special meeting to address and concerns.

Commissioner Santiago closed the meeting by stating that she hoped this would be the first of many meetings between her and the Poinciana residents because she hoped to establish an ongoing dialogue with the people in Poinciana so that she could make sure she was representing the needs of Poinciana to the Polk County Commission.

PRFSC would like to thank Commissioner Santiago for coming to Poinciana and for taking the time to meet and listen to the needs of the Poinciana residents.