

Residents feel deflated after Polk County approves 1,876-home development in Poinciana

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POLK COUNTY, Fla. (WFLA) — Jeremy Knowles was raised to care about conservation. It's why he spent the last 13 months, along with other opponents, gathering information and evidence in opposition to a large housing development on Lake Hatchineha Road in Poinciana.

"It's a scary thing for east rural Polk County but also all of Polk County," said Knowles.

The development, known as Creek Ranch, will build 1,876 homes and commercial space on hundreds of acres of wetlands and woods on Lake Hatchineha Road.

"The roads are going to totally fail with that type of traffic," said Knowles.

"The traffic is just going to quadruple. It's already an issue. There have been accidents. There have been issues with buses," said Deborah Johnson, who also opposes the project.

On Tuesday, Johnson attended a [“De Novo” hearing](#) requested by residents after the project was approved by the county’s planning commission previously.

Knowles, and his fellow opponents, presented their findings to the commission.

“The land proposed for development is environmentally sensitive, old Florida-style ranch,” said Knowles to commissioners. “It is essentially the missing block in connecting crucial conservation lands from north to south.”



Source: Polk County

In order to meet decades-old standards for rural mixed-use development, at least 50% of the property must be reserved for conservation.

“We’re preserving 51.3%. That is 650 acres of wetlands and conservation and open space that is being preserved and will not be touched,” said Bart Allen, a

land use attorney from Peterson & Meyers Law Firm, which is representing the developers of Creek Ranch.

The developers say the project will reserve a 1.25-mile wide corridor for wildlife.

Opponents say the path for animals will actually be closer to 0.3 miles.

“All but choking the corridor and destroying efforts by so many in the state,” said Knowles.

County commissioners voted 3-1 to approve the project Tuesday.

“It works out together. It attaches to wildlife corridor north, south and east,” said Commissioner Bill Braswell.

Commissioner George Lindsey did not vote, citing a business relationship.

Commissioner Neil Combee voted against the project.

“I think the timing is terrible on it. I think it’s just a nightmare waiting to happen in terms of the traffic down there,” he said.

“This area is planned for a lot of improvement to services, roadways are one of them. In three years, Marigold will be widened to four lanes,” said Erik Peterson with Polk County’s land development division.

Marigold Avenue crosses Lake Hatchineha Road at a four-way stop sign near the property.

Peterson said traffic improvements on Lake Hatchineha Road are also being studied.

A housing development is already under construction to the west of the site, at the intersection of Marigold Avenue and Lake Hatchineha Road.

“You cannot ignore the development that’s taken place in Poinciana,” said Commissioner Martha Santiago. “All throughout Poinciana, we have development so when I look at compatibility, I can’t say this is not compatible.”

“You have one side that’s compatible but then you have six other sides that are not,” said Knowles, who calls the project “urban sprawl.”

Knowles and his fellow opponents are taking a few days to come to terms with the approval of the project.

But Knowles said he will keep fighting or the Poinciana he knows will no longer exist.

“The county commissioners yesterday, they set the precedent for the future,” he said. “Yesterday’s vote showed that any large landowner, not just in this area but all of Polk County, they can apply for that and the county commissioners are going to have to say yes.”

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