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County chairman feels county will see lots of growth

By JAMES REDMOND, Times Staff Writer

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The chairman of the Union County Board of County Commissioners is quite optimistic about the growth the county will see over the next 12 months.

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County Chairman Wayne Smith said he sees quite a bit of development for 2006. "There's going to be more people in Union County than you can shake a stick at," Smith said.

He was commenting on the 12 new subdivisions the county approved in 2005. Smith said that if just four people move into the 125 new residences the county can approve for subdivisions in agricultural-zoned areas each year, that 500 new residences will be added to the county. According to numbers from the United States Census Bureau, that could amount to a 5 percent increase in the county's population each year.

While the growth will add residents, it will also add money to ad valorem taxes. Grand Legacy LLP, the developer of the Plantations of Providence subdivision estimates the average price of a home in the development will be \$150,000. Smith said at that price, the subdivision's 83 residences will add \$207,500 in property tax revenue alone each year.

With the amount of growth that is occurring, Smith admitted that more infrastructure, such as emergency medical services, law enforcement and solid waste services would be required. But Smith said the county would not look to add to those services until development occurred.

"The county is looking to add services as the county gets bigger," Smith said. "We'll see where we're going and what we need."

Smith said even if the county desired, there is no way it could put the infrastructure in place ahead of time.

"We just don't have the funds to do it with," Smith said. "We could probably borrow it, but I doubt we could borrow enough to do what we want to do."

Smith said while the board has discussed implementing an impact fee for new growth, it is not an option he is looking to use.

"I'm not in favor of impact fees," Smith said.

Lack of funding is also keeping the county from adding any services in the next 12 months.

"Right now we are not looking at adding to any of the services the county currently provides," Smith said. "Funding will just not allow it."

Smith said the only growth the county will experience in 2006 will be at the road department.

"We are looking at building one more records storage facility, but that will be it," Smith said. "The facility will be for the road department and solid waste, and we'll add it there."

According to Smith, the building was part of the 2005-06 budget fiscal year. He

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said unlike the records storage facilities built last year that were built with a state grant, this one will come entirely from county funding.

One other improvement the county is looking to complete is at the O.J Phillips recreational complex. Last year the county received \$200,000 to upgrade the fields at the complex. Smith said the county is going to use another \$100,000 grant to upgrade or replace the building at the facility.

"We got a \$100,000 grant to improve the facilities at the park," Smith said. "We'll use those funds to either refurbish the current building or put up a new metal building for extra bathrooms."

Roads are one area where Smith expects some progress in 2006.

"We recently finished C.R. 229 from Columbia County to Baker County," Smith said. "We will start resurfacing C.R. 18 next week. Once that's complete, we'll move on to C.R. 239A."

According to Smith, both projects are being completed with funds from the state. C.R. 18 will be funded using the state's Small County Road Assistance Program. C.R. 239A will be repaved thanks to the state's Small County Outreach Program. Both allow counties to maintain roads with funding it would not otherwise have. One area Smith said he sees going in the right direction is the county's current financial situation.

"Right now I don't anticipate any difficulties with the upcoming fiscal year," Smith said. "Everything looks good and everything is running smooth. We have ample funds to keep us going from month to month."

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