



If you or friends
are relocating
CALL US
1-888-838-5478



Sun
and weekly Herald

sun-herald.com

Fri, November 18, 2005

[Home](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Charlotte News](#) | [Englewood News](#) | [North Port News](#) | [DeSoto News](#) | [Venice News](#)

advertisement

Larry
**TAYLOR FUNERAL
and Cremation Services**
*Old Fashioned Service
At A Price You
Can Afford*



CLICK HERE

11/18/05

[Brian Gleason](#) column

Developers must cover road costs

While the broad strokes of an agreement for the state to buy most of Babcock Ranch and for Charlotte to allow Kitson & Partners to develop the rest in exchange for future water access are falling into

place, how the developer will pay for roads and other infrastructure is still unknown.

A long-awaited county analysis of the impacts of the project estimated the \$215 million cost of necessary road improvements exceeds available funds by \$125 million. The principal road providing access to the proposed 17,400-acre development, State Road 31, must be widened to four lanes, six in some areas. County Road 74 (Bermont Road) also must be widened to three lanes between U.S. 17 and S.R. 31. Other road projects include building a new bridge over the Caloosahatchee River in Lee County and possibly adding an Interstate 75 interchange.

The staff reports on Babcock come on the heels of the County Commission's approval Tuesday of a comprehensive plan amendment for the Burnt Store corridor. That approval came despite the fact that the commission dismissed claims by a developer coalition about the financial benefits of development, questioned a shortfall in road funding and complained the plan barely addressed school funding, which will fall on developers under a new state growth management law.

Not only does the Kitson plan similarly exaggerate economic benefits, it concedes road funding is severely inadequate. The county's transportation analysis explicitly states "the developer will be responsible for funding the majority of improvements in their primary access route." Speaking about the need for Burnt Store road improvements, public works director Tom O'Kane made a similar comment: "The need results from the development."


There was no way all the details of the Babcock Ranch purchase could have been addressed in the accelerated time frame demanded by Kitson, but this week's staff analysis clearly shows significant hurdles remain for the project even if the Cabinet approves the purchase of 74,000 acres of the ranch on Tuesday.

As for Burnt Store Road, which covers a larger area than Kitson's Babcock proposal, the approval of the comprehensive plan amendment is likewise a first step, not the finish line for developers. Road projects called for in the plan are underfunded by about \$40 million in today's dollars. Inflation could balloon that number by tens of millions of dollars. For example, a decade delay in widening Midway Boulevard caused that project's cost to soar from \$8 million to more than \$16 million.

The county must move quickly to do three things. First, a controversial impact fee hike must be

accelerated to capture funding for roads. Second, a county-funded economic impact study proposed by Commissioner [Matt DeBoer](#) on Tuesday should be commissioned immediately. Third, a regionwide improvement district should be explored that will generate infrastructure funds and insulate established areas of the county from development expenses.

Development of this area may be inevitable, and the Burnt Store and Babcock plans may be preferable to piecemeal development, but if developers are unwilling or unable to pay the costs their projects will generate, they should be told to go back to the drawing board.

Sunline  © 2005 All rights reserved.
Your Local Internet Service Provider
A division of Sun Coast Media Group Inc.
Publishers of the Sun newspapers.