

WEEKEND WAVE

04-29-16



Friday Economic Roundup

WATCH: Babcock Ranch grand reveal

BABCOCK RANCH, Fla.- In less than a year, residents will be living in homes on [Babcock Ranch](#), the world's first solar powered town.

"It feels awesome, I'll probably buy the first home!" said developer Syd Kitson who adds this day has been 10 years in the making.

Once completed, the ranch will have nearly 20,000 homes, all powered by the sun. "Whenever the sun is out like it is today on this beautiful day, we can keep the lights on and the air conditioners going," said Eric Silagy with FPL. "Then at night, we'll be providing power to the entire community by our gas-fire generation."

The property will house 340,000 solar panels, enough to fill 130 football fields. For nature lovers, another selling point is the community's location right next to the 73,000-acre Babcock Ranch Preserve.

"Be able to hike and not drive 5 to 10 miles to get there and the trail systems here are spectacular and just knowing I can go out and decompress, be a part of nature, that's very gratifying for me," Kitson added.

A town center with a cafe, wellness center and education center will also be built. Construction on the first residential area will start this summer. The homes will have a starting price tag of \$200,000.

[WATCH: Babcock Ranch Grand Reveal](#)

[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

Parks, recreation plan may make North Port eco-tourism destination spot

By Michael Scott Davidson Sarasota Herald-Tribune

NORTH PORT - City leaders approved a plan Tuesday that they hope will put North Port on the path to become an eco-tourism destination.

The new Parks and Recreation Master Plan aims to make the most of the city's 104 square miles, one of the largest municipal areas in all of Florida. North Port is the only city in the state that includes an entire state forest, the 8,539-acre Myakka State Forest.

But while the city boasts abundant land and waterways, North Port lacks tourism amenities such as hotels and restaurants, according to the master plan.

"Therefore the City's focus is to attract new residents, businesses, and day-trippers rather than vacationers," the master plan states.

In April 2015, commissioners approved spending \$150,000 for Toole Design Group to create the master plan. An outline of the plan was given at Tuesday's meeting, before a majority of commissioners voted to accept it as a work product.

The 140-page report will serve as a road map giving North Port leaders direction on which projects to pick, City Manager Jonathan Lewis said. It will stand as its own document, but it will also tie in with Sarasota County's efforts to create a countywide parks and recreation master plan.

Implementing the plan's recommendations over 10 years is estimated to cost \$15 million, with funding coming from grants, voter-approved bonds or special assessments.

North Port has 26 parks and facilities including seven community parks and activity centers, 10 neighborhood parks, seven green space areas and three sports facilities.

Improving on those features is a priority of the master plan, and covers everything from installing restrooms and equestrian trails to acquiring land for habitat protection.

The master plan recommended spending \$1.8 million to create three multipurpose athletic fields and redevelop an existing field at Butler Park.

Also of importance, according to the plan, is to continue expanding the Myakkahatchee Creek Greenway until it connects to the Carlton Reserve north of the city. Residents are also eager for a new public pool or aquatic center.

The master plan recommends upgrading or replacing the historic buildings at Warm Mineral Springs and opening more dining options there for visitors. If North Port acquired the land connecting the springs to Deer Prairie Creek Preserve, it would open opportunities for hiking, kayaking and bird watching.

To expand options for cyclists, the master plan recommends North Port connect to Sarasota County's Legacy Trail and extend it starting from the northwest side of the city. The plan also called for better quality biking options on city streets. North Port residents also weighed in.

Last summer, more than 500 households were surveyed to help determine parks and recreation priorities, according to the master plan.

Residents were asked how they would spend \$100 to fund parks and recreation amenities. The priorities were:

- Development of new aquatic center: \$25.
- Improvements/maintenance of existing parks, pools, and recreation facilities: \$24.
- Acquisition and development of walking and biking trails: \$18.
- Development of new indoor facilities: \$14.
- Other Improvements: \$12.
- Construction of new sports fields: \$7.

Gulf Coast 500

Don't miss the opportunity to be included in the Business Observer's annual Gulf Coast 500 ranking. This year's list will rank the largest for-profit companies headquartered in Charlotte, Collier, Hillsborough, Lee, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk or Sarasota counties by 2015 revenues.

Companies with gross annual revenue of more than \$3 million are encouraged to participate.

Being included in this publication is great exposure for your company - and it's free!

Please contact Jean Gruss by email GC500@BusinessObserverFL.com for additional information or complete the [online form](#). Deadline is April 29, 2016.

National Small Business Week

May 1-7, 2016

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