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DAVIE BRAINSTORMING SESSION

Rethinking the 441 corridor

Using markers and aerial maps, Davie residents and planners interested in improving U.S. 441 drew what they would like the corridor to be.

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Anyone driving along U.S. 441 will inevitably zoom past these scenes: watermelons selling two for \$5 from the back of someone's pick-up truck, narrow sidewalks, billboards advertising burgers and a slew of pawnshops and car dealerships with flapping American flags.

On Saturday, about 65 people -- from Davie residents to professional architects -- met at a community center to draw what they wish to see.

The results: tree-lined streets, wider sidewalks, more hotels and prettier bus stops. Some modeled their ideas on European cities while others simply said a few more trees and safer sidewalks should be the priority.

It's a collaborative hosted by the South Florida Regional Planning Council and funded by a \$2 million federal grant aimed at collecting ideas on how to revive a 25-mile stretch of the highway.

Using markers with names like deco yellow or carmine red, Dora Evans dotted the road with green dots to represent trees and yellow boxes to represent houses. Tracing paper was placed over a table-length aerial map of U.S. 441 bordered by 595 to the north and Stirling Road to the south. There were six tables and each in groups of about 10.

Evans, 45, said she based her ideas on her childhood home of L'Aquila, Italy, a city near Rome. It's a city she visits regularly, she said.

"If we go to the town, we like the outdoor shopping and have cappuccino under outside umbrellas," Evans said. "I like green spaces, trees and fountains."

Next to Evans, Davie Vice Mayor Judy Paul's dog Twostep paced through the community room.

Paul brought her Jack Russell terrier to make the point that if development continues to move west, dog and horse owners will eventually lose space for their animals.

"Redevelopment offers us opportunities that allow us to maintain our rural equestrian areas, and keeps them from being endangered," Paul said, referring to developers who are offering millions to entice Davie ranchers to sell their large tracts of land.

Moderator Marcela Camblor, urban design director for the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, reminded residents and planners that tourists are now flocking to the Seminole Hard Rock Café, which is on Seminole Indian reservation land on U.S. 441. Improvements on the road could entice tourists to spend more time and money at nearby shops.

For the New Jersey family checking in at the hotel on Saturday, U.S. 441 looked like a work in progress.

"I wouldn't give it a second look," said Denise Marsh who was spending a week in South Florida. "It almost looks like it's still under construction."

Still others remained optimistic.

Rick Blitman, a Davie resident who visited the hotel for the first time Saturday, said he doesn't expect 441 will ever become like the famed wide, coffee-shop-lined Parisian sidewalks of the Champs-Élysées.

But, he said, some improvements are obviously needed.

"441 is strip centers, warehouses," Blitman said. "I would love it if they could make it look beautiful."