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# Trees In Limbo Ahead of Project

**Apartment complex to be rebuilt after hurricanes of 2004.**

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LAKE WALES | When the Sunrise Apartment Complex was demolished following hurricane damage in 2004, a few relics of the Lake Wales development did manage to survive.

Standing tall behind chain link fencing, towering oaks continue to dot the property where they once provided shade for multi-family buildings and parked cars.

Now that the Lake Wales Housing Authority has chosen Norstar USA to rebuild the community with more than 900 units, city and Polk County officials are required to decide the fate of those trees.

"We can't save them all," says Margaret Swanson, director of the city's planning department.

But, she said, "We have identified 20 trees worthy of consideration."

Swanson said several trees were damaged in 2004 when three hurricanes swept through Polk County. The first one, Hurricane Charley, hit Lake Wales particularly hard, damaging buildings throughout the city.

Damaged trees are considered a risk, as they could come down on buildings and vehicles.

In addition to the damaged trees, Swanson says, the planning department doesn't want to get in the way of the new project.



PAUL JOHNSON | THE LEDGER (2004)  
THE SUNRISE PARK APARTMENTS in Lake Wales suffered extensive damage during the hurricane season of 2004. Now the complex is to be rebuilt. The future of trees on the site is unclear.

"We have to let the developer develop the land," Swanson says.

County Forester Carrie Kotal says there is a long list of reasons why mature, shade-giving trees ought to be preserved on the site of new developments.

"They provide aesthetic beauty," Kotal says, "they lower cooling costs of a home, and provide wildlife value, such as (a habitat for) songbirds."

And beyond ecological or energy-saving reasons, Kotal says, "People just really like their trees."

Al Kirkland Jr., executive director of the Lake Wales Housing Authority, says the authority has "always been in favor of saving as many (trees) as possible."

"The trees, with a new development," Kirkland says, "would truly enhance the property. And I believe the residents would enjoy them."

Rick Cavalieri, project manager with Norstar USA, says the developers will be taking the trees identified by the planning department into consideration when planning the development.

But, he said, "it is going to be some time before we get to that point."

The developer is still waiting to receive tax credits from the Florida Housing Finance Corp. before it proceeds with plans for the first phase of the project.

Tax credit recipients are expected to be notified by October, at which point planning can begin. Costs for the project are contingent upon received tax credits.

Cavalieri said the initial phase of the project will be 720 family units. Phases II and III of the project would provide for 120 senior units, of which 70 would be public housing units. The City of Lake Wales signed a letter of support for the Sunrise development in May of this year.

The planning department has preserved other mature trees in recent developments - most notably, the large, fenced-in oak at the entrance of the Lowe's Home Improvement store on U.S. 27, which is estimated to be between 400 and 600 years old.

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