



Glades Sees Reinvestment, Job Gains Through County Business Assistance Programs

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A key focus of the County's economic development efforts is Palm Beach County's "other coast," the Glades Region. More than \$8.4 million has been invested in commercial expansions in the Glades through the County's business assistance programs. These investments have leveraged total project costs in excess of \$18 million, and will result in 275 new full time jobs.

Working in concert with the Lake Okeechobee Regional Economic Alliance (LORE), the Board of County Commissioners carved out areas on Bacom Point Road and Main Street in Pahokee, and along Avenue A in Belle Glade as designated revitalization corridors, for a dedicated portion of the Section 108 Loan Pool to encourage business development in these economically distressed communities. The 108 program has been further leveraged by loan programs through the Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture, making it possible for small businesses to accomplish their expansion goals and become a partner in the redevelopment of the Glades cities. The financing has helped companies with property acquisition, construction, machinery and equipment, and working capital costs.

The most recent Glades projects underway include:

- Renovation of the Belle Glade Old City Hall into a mixed-use development under construction by BI Development, LLC. This \$2.5 Million project is transforming the long-abandoned structure, preserving its historical features, placing it back into productive use and enhancing the Avenue A streetscape.
- EHR Tech LLC – this renovated office on Bacom Point Road in Pahokee houses the headquarters for a medical records software company that will install and operate integrated medical record keeping systems required by all physicians pursuant to a federal mandate.

Additional projects are in the pipeline with the potential to invest more than \$12 Million in capital costs and create another 200 jobs.

Businesses are realizing the advantages to locating in the Glades, including the proximity to U.S. Route 27, the availability of vacant land, eligibility for Enterprise Zone tax credits or refunds, and access to capital.

However, in order to sustain continued economic development, infrastructure improvements are needed to serve the commercial corridors and also enhance the quality of life for Glades residents. That is at the crux of the County's most recent planning effort in the western community – the development of the Glades Region Master Plan. Infrastructure needs affecting drinking water, wastewater systems, roads, storm water drainage, and public transit in relation to employment centers have been analyzed, and priority recommendations for improvements are being formulated to create a comprehensive document that will serve as a guide in requesting implementation dollars from funding agencies.

Among the recent visible improvements in the Glades has been the demolition of abandoned and unsafe structures and removal of asbestos. The County's Glades Demolition Program in cooperation with the Glades city building departments and law enforcement has invested nearly \$1.2 Million to demolish 56 buildings that have become eyesores and havens for criminal activity. This is an important step toward creating a better community and an environment that is conducive to economic development. And the work continues.