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ORANGE CITY DEVELOPMENT IRKS RESIDENTS

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ORANGE CITY -- Development may have turned the woods and wetlands around Goose Lake into a bulldozed sandscape for now.

However, soon it will become a beautifully landscaped commercial center that will serve as a gateway to the "Emerald City," developers and city officials say.

Some nearby homeowners see the project as their worst nightmare come to life. City leaders see it as an economic boon about to happen.

The tract at Saxon Boulevard and I-4 is owned by a group of investors, represented by Maury Carter and Associates, an Orlando real estate company. The group bought 64 acres last August for \$1.15 million. Current zoning would allow such uses as a shopping center or retail stores.

Several groups are reportedly interested in the site, but company spokesman **Daryl Carter** declined to discuss specifics. None of the uses have been nailed down yet, Carter said. It could become a free-standing large retail store, a strip center or something else, he said. An announcement could be made within a month, he said.

Site development is proceeding on 21 acres, permitted by the city and the St. Johns River Water Management District.

The permits allow the filling of 6.47 acres of wetlands on the side of the lake nearest Saxon. In return, 13 acres of wetlands must be recreated on the opposite end of the lake to provide new habitat for the wood storks that live there.

The developers will dedicate 35 acres for a conservation buffer, according to a permit from the water management district. The city permit requires the replanting of 399 trees. City Manager Bruce Behrens said the project will be a model for what development should be, "in terms of the way the public was included and the way the environment was treated."

Nearby homeowners find little to cheer as the woods disappear and trucks roll in with the heavy equipment.

Lack Layton led the fight against the development back in 1992 and 1993. County officials told him when he bought his home the wooded wetland area across the street was never going to be developed, he said.

"Nobody's happy with it," said Lloyd Kindred, another homeowner. "It's just a real mess. There's constant noise from 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m."

Kindred said developer Jeff Douglas, one of the investor/owners, seems like a nice guy with good intentions, but that doesn't offset the problems.

"They're tearing up the roads worse than you can believe," he said. "This is very expensive property. I have two more lots down here. I don't know whether they're going to be worth anything by the time they get done."

Carter, Behrens and Mayor Tony Yebba said the larger lake will increase property values and help the city's taxbase.

Layton said he'll wait and see. "I wouldn't mind if they clean it up and make it a lake, but I don't want to see it become a filthy hole in the ground."