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Liberia park nears completion

Mayor pledges to continue ferreting out drug dealers

*BY RICK NEALE
FLORIDA TODAY*

When city officials floated the idea of converting crime-ridden Liberia Avenue into a "linear park," many Powell subdivision residents reacted with distrust, resident James Culver said.

But after nearly three years of construction, much of this neighborhood's skepticism is gone.

Work crews have transformed the eight-block roadway into a \$1.5 million pedestrian-friendly thoroughfare, fit for a college campus. Improvements so far include five roundabouts, curving sidewalks, expanses of green grass and -- notably for flood-plagued neighbors -- a retention pond.

"It's not perfect. There's things that need to be improved," Culver said. "But we've come a long way."

More than 40 people attended a community meeting detailing the Liberia Avenue revitalization effort Thursday night at Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church. Police Chief Bill Berger pledged to continue pursuing drug dealers after construction is complete.

"We will not give this back to those people who had an effect on your lives," Berger said.

Palm Bay Public Works Director Jim Proce and Gary Perkins, assistant superintendent of parks and recreation, fielded questions from residents. Concerns revolved around safety, including lighting, fencing, maintenance, school zones and signage.

Proce said final steps include landscaping, cleanup work and installation of entryway signs.

"We're still pushing for the end of the month. But more than likely, it'll be the end of July," he said.

Perkins said a grant was approved Thursday afternoon to finance installation of a "climber" apparatus for children at the adjacent Liberia Avenue water park. Picnic tables will also be added.

Organizers credited Palm Bay police officers Sgt. Tim Lancaster and Officer Bob Combs with helping conceive the plan in early 2003.

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