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NEWS

RELIEF COULD COME FOR WATER WOES

By

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Standing in calf-deep water where the street used to be, Earle Denton looked like he was in Venice, Italy, rather than his east Orange County neighborhood.

The smile on Denton's face – and the “No wake” sign he posted as a joke – belied the serious situation caught in the snapshot. During the big rains of 1994, Central Florida's last really wet year, the Rio Pinar subdivision flooded. Again.

Getting a handle on storm water is one of the major reasons Denton supports the upcoming 1-cent sales tax. The \$99 million in tax-funded stormwater projects offer relief to Rio Pinar, Tangelo Park and many other flood-prone areas.

“People have to have the intestinal fortitude,” said Denton, president of the Orange County Homeowners Association, which has taken no official stand on the issue. “It's something that if we don't get done, it will be a health problem. The land will not be as usable.”

Seven of every 10 projects involve flood prevention and drainage, but the remaining 30 percent deal with water-quality problems in lakes and rivers. Some deal with potential drinking water threats.

Projects address known needs and are ready to be built, said M. Krishnamurthy, who runs the county's stormwater program.

“They are all construction-oriented – no studies, nothing utopian,” Krishnamurthy said.

Generally, solutions to drainage problems include widening pipes and ditches to carry more water and the addition or enlargement of ponds and catch basins to capture and treat stormwater. That involves land, which is always expensive.

The county had a ready blueprint for its project list from a 1996 study, which found \$121 million in needs. That report followed near-record rainfall of 1994, punctuated by an end-of-the-year drenching by Tropical Storm Gordon.

The rain gauge at Orlando International Airport recorded nearly 68 inches of rain in 1994 – about 18 inches more than average rainfall. Standing water was everywhere.

Even in times of regular or low rainfall, problems arise.

2025
\$1.38 billion

where is money
going to come
from and will older
neighborhoods suffer