

Restoring the Village meeting continues anti-violence discussion

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This week's second community action meeting about the violence in northwest Fort Pierce was less well-attended than the first, but perhaps more was achieved.

Less than half of the 800 residents who came to state Rep. Larry Lee's first Call to Action meeting on July 31 turned out for the **Restoring the Village** get-together on Monday evening. Yet the 300 people in attendance learned a lot more about programs that are already combating the violence.

Police Chief Sean Baldwin, in particular, rolled out a passel of initiatives his department is working on, ranging from getting police officers out of their patrol cars and onto the streets, to enlisting the help of the faith community to foster residents' trust.

What really marked Monday's meeting, though, was talk about creating jobs.

Unemployment rates in Fort Pierce are at least a third higher than the rest of the county, and jobless rates in northwest Fort Pierce are probably at least double those for the rest of the city.

So it wasn't surprising that some of the night's biggest cheers came after Palm Beach Gardens entrepreneur John Armbrust announced a \$150 million petroleum tank farm project at the Port of Fort Pierce. There was even applause when Armbrust insisted his project was "real" and would provide 200 construction and 75 permanent operational positions "if you want us."

We've heard about the tank farm project before, but this is the first time details have been released publicly.

Armbrust's Florida Fuel Connection business would receive bulk gasoline, diesel and jet fuel via three or four 20,000-ton barges a week from Port Everglades in Broward County. Once in Fort Pierce, much of the fuel would be transferred to rail cars and sent across the state to a terminal in Hendry County to supply Fort Myers and other interior counties, while some would be used on the Treasure Coast. Supplying fuel to Central Florida by rail would reduce traffic congestion and pollution, Armbrust argued. The project also could plug a hole in the regional fuel supply chain after hurricanes, he said.

St. Lucie County Administrator Faye Outlaw and Port Director Don West both said they haven't discussed the project with Armbrust. West said the current Port Master Plan might need amending, which is a fairly long process.

Local environmentalists have expressed reservations about transporting volatile fuels into the port and the possibility of devastating the Indian River Lagoon, should there be a fuel spill.

We'll have to wait for more details of the tank farm project to fully assess its impact.

Monday's meeting seemed to encourage many in the audience. They feel progress is being made in the fight against violence. Yet almost everyone I spoke to mentioned the danger of losing momentum and seeing support for anti-violence efforts fizzle.

Lee is very aware of that danger. He said he doesn't want to burn the community out with frequent big meetings such as Monday's, but pointed out that many groups — such as the pastors' — already meet weekly to keep their mission on track. Future community meetings will keep residents aware of overall progress, Lee promised.

I, too, was encouraged by Monday's meeting, despite the lower attendance. Let's hope the jobs picture will become clearer in time.

Economic prosperity is a huge component in **restoring** the **village** to its former health, but it shouldn't ever be at the expense of harming the jewel of the Treasure Coast, the Indian River Lagoon.

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