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Port St. Lucie won't pursue Becker lawsuits

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PORT ST. LUCIE — City council members instructed their attorneys Monday to dismiss 30 condemnation lawsuits filed against lot owners on Becker Road, reaffirming last month's decision to scale back widening plans for the road to save time and money.

But council members remained sharply divided on the move, with Vice Mayor Jack Kelly and Councilwoman Linda Bartz opposed to the second upheaval in Becker's design.

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won't be built.

City council members are continuing with plans to make Becker four lanes but are scaling back beautification plans that required acquisition of every residential lot on Becker between Interstate 95 and Florida's Turnpike. That would be 224 in all.

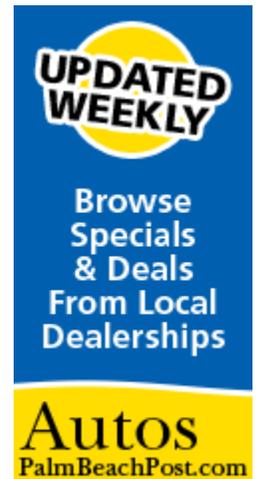
Because 30 of the first lot owners refused to sell at the city's proposed price, City Attorney Roger Orr estimated the case would wind up in an appellate court that could block construction for at least two years. An appraiser for the landowners valued their lots at \$180,000 to \$225,000, while the city proposed giving them roughly \$50,000 apiece.

Under the new scenario, which will require acquisition of 70 lots for drainage ponds off of Becker Road, construction could begin in six months because the road can be widened to four lanes within the city's existing property limits.

Because the city would have spent roughly \$50 million on the grandiose version of Becker, compared to \$30 million for the scaled-back version, officials are using the savings to widen Floresta Drive simultaneously.

Only a few lots are needed for drainage on Floresta, which will be widened to four lanes from Southbend to Prima Vista boulevards. The first phase will stretch from Southbend to Port St. Lucie Boulevard, while the second phase will extend north to Thornhill Drive.

Kelly argued that the city should proceed with the more ambitious design of Becker or the city will have spent



up to \$1.5 million in legal fees for nothing. Orr said the city is required to pay reasonable attorneys and expert fees involving the 30 lot owners, but he said the fees would have been much lower if the case had continued and a jury had assigned a value to the lots.

In that case, attorneys would have been entitled only to a portion of the gain in price they secured for landowners.

"That's a significant amount of money," Kelly said of the potential legal costs. "We could buy a lot of property for \$1.5 million."

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