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Lobbyist seeks cash for parkway

Firm to work on energy grant

*BY LINDA JUMP
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The city's lobbyist this year will seek federal dollars for the proposed Palm Bay Parkway, as well as money to study the feasibility of a solar panel farm at the city's water treatment plant.

Val Gelnovatch of the Ferguson Group outlined her plans to the city council recently, listing eight projects. Some have been on the list for years, such as gaining funding for the proposed Palm Bay Parkway that would go from northeast Palm Bay south and east to a proposed interchange on Interstate 95 near Micco Road.

New this year are energy and environmental grants to upgrade sludge treatment at the South Regional center and money for 700 trees and to study the feasibility of a solar panel. The 700 oak and other native trees would be placed on city property, primarily parks, to balance carbon emissions.

"We met with all the department heads in the fall to talk about their needs and developed this list," Gelnovatch said.

She said the city will go after some newly funded programs. "This year, they've added several environmentally friendly projects that I think the city could benefit from."

The solar farm would be near the new South Regional Water Treatment Plant to generate power for it. "That one's a candidate for direct funding," Gelnovatch said. She didn't say how much money would be requested for each project.

The firm has tried to get funding for a new mobile command center for the past two years and for Knecht Park stormwater improvements last year, both unsuccessfully. Both projects remain on the list.

Mayor John Mazziotti said getting federal money for trees and a solar study is good. "But we have tons of roads to be paved, drainage areas to be improved and utilities to go in. It's nice to have street-scaping, but I'd rather get money for roads."

Gelnovatch said most federal funding is earmarked for specific projects, not for general paving.

Councilman Milo Zonka said any federal funds would free up city dollars for other things, such as paving.

Councilman Ed Geier said the city is "needy, not greedy" but hopes to get its fair share of grant money.

City officials praised the Ferguson Group for keeping city officials informed about their actions in Congress. The Ferguson Group Inc. of Washington, D.C., is paid \$96,000 annually as the city's federal lobbyists.

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