

Business Owners Hear Busch Project Plans

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TAMPA - Jamal Mohammed owns about 30 town houses at Busch Boulevard and 50th Street, but he was thinking about selling them. The neighborhood, he said, wasn't getting any better.

That's why he's one of dozens of business owners along the boulevard who came to a meeting Monday night at Busch Gardens to learn more about what's planned for one of the city's ugliest roads. He had read about the repaving project, the palm trees and classic new streetlights.

"I'd like it to happen," Mohammed said. "It would raise property values, and we could get better renters. But I'm afraid it'll be like the Temple Terrace plan, which doesn't seem to be going anywhere."

The Busch Boulevard project, which combines up to \$18 million of federal, state and local dollars, is very real. And it's going to get under way in the next two years, Tampa city Councilman Shawn Harrison said.

The plan calls for repaving the six-lane boulevard between Florida Avenue and 56th Street, repairing sidewalks, installing textured crosswalks and new signals and installing new landscaping in the medians.

Several business owners discussed the need for better lighting on the boulevard, but transportation planner Alan Steinbeck said the project probably won't include new lights unless property owners agree to assume some of the cost. City leaders are proposing a Busch Boulevard Business Coalition to help see the project through to fruition.

Fred Manzar, who recently bought a Subway restaurant on Busch Boulevard, said he spent the bulk of his budget renovating the inside of the sandwich shop but made few improvements to the exterior. He would support a plan for business owners to help pick up the cost for improved lighting and landscaping.

"If everyone chips in, then I would be willing to pay my share, too," Manzar said.