

## Wabasso may have to wait a year for street lights to come on

By Henry A. Stephens staff writer

WABASSO — After waiting since 1999, residents west of 58th Avenue and north of County Road 510 could see safer nights with street lights, they learned Monday from county officials.

But they'll have to wait about a year more, County Administrator Joe Baird said.

"Probably, to be truthful, it will be 2005 before the lights are in," Baird told about 95 West Wabasso residents. "That's how long it takes. Street lighting is not a high priority for FPL."

He referred to Florida Power & Light Co., which would provide 42 power poles and electricity after the county pays a \$7,500 installation fee.

Nobody spoke for the power company in the town-hall meeting in St. Matthew's Missionary Baptist Church.

County Environmental Health Specialist Julianne Renk scheduled the meeting as part of an ongoing multi-agency effort to improve living conditions in what she called a largely ignored community.

"They've been overlooked for such a long time and promised stuff and nobody's ever followed through," Renk said.

Resident Barry Broxton, 40, expressed such frustration. He recalled community leaders asking county Public Works Director Jim Davis for street lights in 1999, followed by Davis' response in 2000 that he was seeking FPL's input.

Davis recalled being just as frustrated with getting action from FPL.

Baird and Davis said they would ask the County Commission to establish a street-lighting tax district to raise the funds for the equipment. After the installation fee, Davis said, the service would cost about \$600 per month, divided among residents.

How much each would pay, however, Davis said, would depend on county Property Appraiser David Nolte determining how many property owners would fall within the district.

Pressed by residents, Baird agreed to speed the process and ask the County Commission to let him borrow from contingency funds to pay for the installation.

At one point, Wabasso commercial-property owner Ron Gaudet offered to write the county a check Monday night as a loan with a 9 percent interest to get the electric poles. Despite excited whispers in the audience, county officials declined to accept the offer.