



## NEWS RELEASE

### **Ruby Street Stormwater & Beautification Project**

#### **Will Enhance Local Bee Population**

**February 1, 2017, For Immediate Release, Tavares, FL:** A feature of the Ruby Street Stormwater project is the inclusion of a pedestrian walkway on top of the berms separating the treatment pond cells. The slope of the berms, the area between the walk path and the water's edge, will be planted with native wildflowers. The seed mix that will be used is designed to provide colorful, native species that are effective in nitrogen uptake. These plants will assist with the stormwater treatment process, further protecting Lake Dora. The plants on these berm slopes will also serve another purpose. They will provide a natural habitat for local pollinator species such as butterflies, hummingbirds and most importantly, bees.

Our local pollinator communities have been suffering in some areas due to changes in agricultural practices, loss of unimproved grasslands, urbanization and the spread of pathogens. These factors have led to the decline of many native bees, along with a reduction of managed honeybee colonies. Also, chronic exposure to insecticides, even when they are used appropriately, affects the foraging behavior of honeybees. Bees and their pollination activity play a vital role in agriculture. And, in non-agricultural areas, bees perpetuate floral growth and provide attractive habitats for other animals such as insects and birds.

To effectively educate local residents about the importance of bees and other pollinators, and to promote the local bee population, the City of Tavares and their consultants from Griffey Engineering sought guidance and expertise from the Florida Wildflower Cooperative and members of the Lake County Beekeepers Club. "Agriculture is a key component of our local economy," said Bob Tweedie, Economic Development Director for the City of Tavares. "Bee colonies are essential to the agricultural circle of life, and we want to do our part in providing an environment where pollinators can thrive."

Regarding the Ruby Street Stormwater Project and its emphasis on planning a bee friendly environment, Kris Gehman, President of the Lake County Beekeepers Club, provided the following statement:

"It was very heartening to hear that the City of Tavares was open to the idea of designing their storm water project as a park with pollinator friendly plants instead of just using concrete and turf grass. It is my hope this park will generate conversation and encourage and inspire visitors to consider the benefit of this type of landscaping versus 'just grass'.

Most native pollinator plants require very little maintenance once established, and it can be very entertaining watching the activity around the flowers. It's estimated that one out of every three bites

of food we eat exists because of pollinators like bees. A hard-working pollinator, the honeybee, provides other benefits from their pollination work such as honey and bees wax for products like candles.

Honeybees are fascinating insects with a very strong social structure. Several thousand worker bees cooperate in hive building, food collection, brood rearing and defense. Each member has a definite task to perform, based on its adult age, but surviving and reproducing takes the combined efforts of the entire colony. It is terrific that the City of Tavares recognizes the need to provide our local bee population with a beneficial environment, as well as furthering the understanding of our local citizens about the need for pollinators.”

The City of Tavares will provide interpretive stations featuring photos and educational content throughout the completed stormwater project, informing visitors about the plants and wildlife that inhabit the park.

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