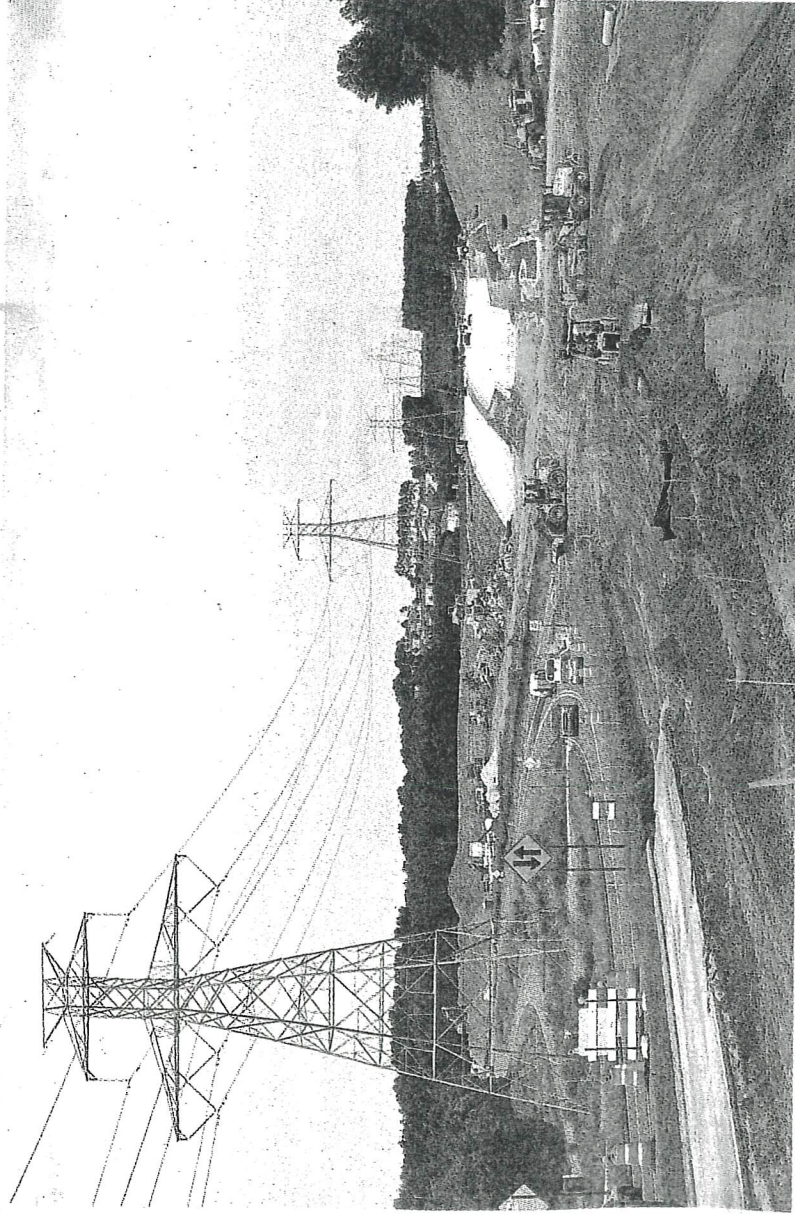


Poll frontrunners also have most cash. See **Nation, AZ**

Golf rom playing it cool as the sport's best tee off at St. Andrews. See **Sports, BI**

THURSDAY, JULY 16, 2015

Road to the future



BRETT LE BLANC / DAILY COMMERCIAL

Construction crews work Tuesday on a road that will eventually connect with the new Florida Turnpike interchange in Minneola.

Turnpike interchange expected to bring changes to Minneola and beyond

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The city of Minneola last month gave the green light to a huge development — The Hills of Minneola — that will bring in nearly 4,000 homes, loads of industrial, retail and office space and a new K-8 school. But none of that would have occurred if not for a key decision to build a Florida Turnpike interchange in Minneola.

The project was awarded to Middlesex Corporation, an Orlando-based company that specializes in construction services for civil, heavy highway, marine, rail, bridge, paving and site work projects in New England and Central Florida.

The Turnpike Enterprise and the Florida Department of Transportation has set aside \$41

“The Turnpike will be bringing in a lot of positive things for a lot of people. The impact is not going to be just for Minneola but for everyone in south Lake County. We’re all going to benefit from this.”

Aaron Mercer,
Minneola City Planner

million for the project. Minneola City Officials said when the city put the project out for bid, they were looking at about \$30 million to start. Middlesex Corporation's bid came in at \$27 million and they were awarded the project.

“After so many years of planning, FDOT/Turnpike is looking forward to finally adding this regionally important interchange as another trip option for motorists in this rapidly growing area,” said Christa Deason, spokeswoman for Florida's Turnpike Enterprise.

Minneola City Manager Mark Johnson said the Hills of Minneola project is expected to have a

\$1 billion impact to Lake County and provide more than 700 permanent jobs.

City Planner Aaron Mercer said the Turnpike is the foundation for not only that development but many others that had been approved in the 2005-2007 years. Many of those laid dormant when the economy screeched to a halt.

Mercer said the interchange will likely revive those projects, meaning about 10,000 new homes along with commercial and industrial development. He said neighboring cities and projects, including Trilogy and the future Villa City, will benefit from it, as well, because it will give residents access to the Turnpike and to Orlando much quicker and easier than ever before.

“All those are ramping up. The catalyst of the Turnpike is reviving all of it,” Mercer said. “The Turnpike will be bringing in a lot of positive things for a lot of people. The impact is not going to be just for Minneola but for everyone in south Lake County. We’re all going to benefit from this.”

SEE TURNPIKE, A6

TURNPIKE

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Middlesex is charged with building the new interchange at milepost 279, north of State Road 50 and south of U.S. Highway 27 in Lake County.

"This will be a full interchange with access to the Turnpike in both northbound and southbound directions," a description reads.

The project is expected to be completed within 24 months, but since it's a design-build type project, Mercer said no

ground is expected to be turned later this summer. Deason said the project should reduce traffic on sections of SR 50 and US 27 and will make the commute to Orlando much shorter for many people.

Minneola Mayor Pat Kelley said he also expects the Turnpike to enhance Minneola's economic competitiveness, leverage private investment and add value to the existing communities.

"The City Council has worked very hard over the last several years. It took a lot of proactive work to make this project

a reality and I think a lot of our residents are very excited," City Manager Johnson said. "It will be a gateway to the city."

Johnson said city residents have been very supportive of the project. Residents who have expressed worry about the loss of rural roads and views are mainly county residents or those who live near Montverde, bordering the Hills of Minneola project, he said.

Mercer also said that with the Turnpike in the works, Southstar, the Hills of Minneola's developer, will jump into their project very soon.

BUSING

FROM PAGE A1

they are subject to collective bargaining. While the district recently learned it will receive an additional \$12.5 million from the state for the coming school year, the School Board must decide how to spend that money, whether for courtesy busing or for additional teachers for a growing student population.

Dodd said he struggles to see where district administrators allocated in the classroom. He had hoped district officials would pour that money into intervention teachers or academic tutors.

Instead, the budget consists of significant increases in administrative departments, he said.

For example, he said the Exceptional Student Education department increased its budget 29 percent when many of the services are contracted out.

"The chief of administration had a 38 percent increase, information technology 8 percent, superintendent's office 20 percent, and curriculum and instruction 16 percent," he said.

Stuart Klattie, president of the Lake County Education Association, said the budget was identical to previous years.

"We are not looking at many administrative changes that result in more resources going into the classroom," he said.

But Mathias disagreed with Dodd and Klattie.

"In keeping with the strategic finance plan of redeploying \$10 million a year back into the classroom, we are on target," he said.

School Board member Stephanie Luke agreed.

"In the strategic finance plan, several of our key initiatives do impact the classroom," she said. "I have talked to a couple of teachers about a couple of options about more teachers. The feedback I am getting is where are we supposed to put more teachers?"

However, Mathias said he did not understand one area of the budget. Each school is allocated \$2.9 million in discretionary funding for supplies.

Yet, he said, many teachers continue to request resources for the classroom. "I want to know where those dollars are going," he said.

Klattie said, on average, teachers spend \$500 a year out of their own pockets on supplies.

School Board members will set the tentative property tax rate Monday.

IRAN

FROM PAGE A1

agreement. In remarks to Israel's parliament, Netanyahu said he was not bound by the terms of the deal and could still take military action against Iran.

"We will reserve our right to defend ourselves against all of our enemies," said Netanyahu, who sees Iran's suspected pursuit of a nuclear weapon as a threat to Israel's existence.

In Congress, resistance comes not only from Republicans, but also Obama's own Democratic Party. Vice President Joe Biden spent the morning on Capitol Hill meeting privately with House Democrats, telling reporters as he left that he was confident they would get behind a deal.

The president said he welcomed a "robust" debate with Congress, but showed little patience for what he cast as politically motivated opposition.

Lawmakers can't block the nuclear deal, but they can try to undermine it by insisting U.S. sanctions stay in place. In Tehran, Iranians took to the streets to celebrate the accord, and even Iran's hardliners offered only mild criticism — a far cry from the outspoken opposition that the White House had feared.

The nuclear accord has become a centerpiece of Obama's foreign policy, a high-stakes gamble that

The accord requires Iran to dismantle key elements of its nuclear program, lower its uranium enrichment levels, and give up thousands of centrifuges.

INVASION

FROM PAGE A1

Sheriff's Office, another occupant was shot in the hand.

Residents Lori and Joseph Horn reportedly told detectives they tried to walk out of their bedroom.

spokesman, said de were already patrol the area due to know drug and gun activity when they received a call and were able to respond quickly. The affidavit adds deputies arrived and spotted two more suspects.