

THOMAS

FROM PAGE C1

playing angles and piling up campaign money from the traditional ruling clique.

When I think of Segal, I think: *Four more years!* The shake-up candidate is Commissioner **Linda Stewart**. Her political appeal is her complete lack of political polish. But what she lacks in delivery, she compensates for with good, populist instincts. Challenging Crotty on the toll increases was a classic example. Segal spent that week pushing for a retractable-roof stadium on International Drive. You tell me who is in touch with the people.

Her vision for making this a better place to live is dumping the vision we've been following the past 15 years.

It's not a bad message. Her ability to articulate it in a coherent message is her biggest challenge.

She has to sound mayoral. The development industrial complex would throw buckets of money to stop her. But in 2002, Stewart upset a heavily-funded incumbent with lots of leg-work and a strong grass-

roots movement.

The earthquake candidate would be former commissioner **Teresa Jacobs**. The difference between her and Stewart is that Jacobs never has a problem articulating what she has to say.

Jacobs also has X-ray vision and super hearing, so nothing — absolutely nothing — gets by her. She used these superpowers to battle Crotty at commission meetings, usually with Stewart as her trusty sidekick.

Now Stewart wants top billing, while Jacobs has her own interest in the job.

That these two allies could battle certainly would bring discomfort to their mutual supporters. The fear is that divided, they would fall.

Jacobs obviously would be formidable. But by the time the election gets here, she will have been out of office two years, which is a long, long time in Central Florida. Good luck raising money.

My hope is that Jacobs considers running for the new post of a powerful school board chair. She brings immediate credibility to a School Board that sorely lacks it. I can only imagine what she'd find digging into that massive bureaucracy.

The are-you-crazy candidate is **Mel Martinez**. OK,

maybe it is crazy. But he's coming home. He has nothing better to do. He never finished his first stint as Orange mayor, leaving us to wonder what he might have accomplished. Think about it, Mel.

It would be nice if **Toni Jennings** also would think about it. But she won't.

And now one last thought that brings in **Fran Pignone**. She is a former Orange commissioner. Before there was a Teresa Jacobs, there was Fran Pignone, a fast-thinking, fast-talking thorn in the side of the status quo.

Pignone forms much of the brain trust behind Linda Stewart. But it sure would be good to have her back in the game.

Think of Pignone running for Stewart's seat as Stewart ran for mayor as Jacobs ran for School Board chair.

They could almost run as one — the Three Amigas taking over the town.

It's a simple message that could tap into a lot of dissatisfaction.

And it also would make for a great T-shirt.

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PARKS

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mote arts and culture.

Mayor Buddy Dyer told his staff to prepare for an across-the-board 12 percent budget cut just two weeks ago because of falling tax revenues. But Monday, he said both park projects — which total \$745,000, including the county's portion of the Lake Eola upgrades — are worthwhile.

"It's certainly appropriate to improve and maintain the quality of our iconic signature park," he said.

The Lake Eola project is part of an ongoing plan to upgrade the Walt Disney Amphitheater. The city has already spent \$340,000 burying electrical conduit around more than half the lake. The work started in 2003, but stopped because of a lack of funds. When a spike in housing values filled local government coffers with extra property taxes, the city

did another section in 2006.

The conduit will allow the city to broadcast band-shell performances around the park from hidden speakers. But the audio upgrade is just part of a plan to spruce up the band shell. City officials also want to add new video-projection equipment and a movie screen, expand a control booth that sound and video engineers use during performances, renovate backstage dressing rooms and add 200 seats.

The video and lighting equipment would replace used gear donated by Disney just two years ago; city officials say it's "deteriorating and in need of constant repair." The city hasn't put a price on this second phase.

Lisa Early, director of the Families, Parks and Recreation Department, said the work will help the band shell book more events. She said interest in the band shell is high among promoters — until they see it.

"When they find out what

kind of equipment we have and its limitations, they just don't bring their acts here," Early said. It would bring in more rental fees, and cut maintenance expenses on the equipment, she added.

Dyer said the project can go forward because the city's half of the money comes from a downtown taxing district instead of the general budget, which covers expenses such as police and fire protection.

That's not the case with the \$225,000 master plan. Planning firm Glattig Jackson Kercher Anglin Inc. was hired with money from the general budget to make recommendations about the city's parks and recreation needs.

"This will really help us determine the core, main things we need to be focusing on in the next five to 10 years," Early said.

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STIMULUS

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\$5 million of it — almost 20 percent of DeLand's \$27 million request — will be headed to Spring Hill if everything works out as planned.

"We need stimulus money badly for this community," said Pastor Anthony Brown of Back to Basics II Outreach Ministries on Adelle Avenue. "Three years ago that [Adelle Avenue] was a dirt road. That's crazy. It's the 21st century."

Of the \$5 million request, \$3.5 million would be used to complete a sewer project. The other \$1.5 million is slated for the Spring Hill Community Resource Center and Spring Hill Boys and Girls Club.

DeLand City Manager Michael Pleus said these projects were already in the pipeline for funding, but budget cuts halted them.

'A lot of empty promises'

James Cusack, chairman of the Spring Hill Neighborhood Association, said Spring Hill has long been considered an eyesore in the county and that local politicians have made halfhearted pledges to improve it.

"A lot of empty promises have been made to the citizens," Cusack said. "We have people in this community who like to beat the band about what they would like to see done, and there's no follow-through."

Clarence "Bo" Davenport has been a Spring Hill resident for 45 years and is DeLand's former public-works director.

"We were the last one to get anything from government," Davenport, 71, said. "They say it's because of a lack of funds, but projects get shifted around when you're dealing with government."

Both Cusack and Davenport said another reason Spring Hill has not had more improvements is because it was not incorporated into DeLand. In 2002, efforts to annex the community of 2,000 people into the city failed,



ROBERTO GONZALEZ/ORLANDO SENTINEL

'We were the last one to get anything from government,' says Clarence 'Bo' Davenport, a Spring Hill resident for 45 years.

with some residents objecting because of fear about tax increases and urban sprawl. However, in late 2003 more than 100 property owners signed agreements to have their properties annexed, resulting in a patchwork of incorporated and unincorporated areas in Spring Hill.

Despite the failed annexation attempt, city and county officials said the community has experienced significant progress. State and federal grants have funded \$3 million in infrastructure upgrades, Pleus said.

Other improvements have come from the Spring Hill Community Redevelopment Agency, a joint county-city agency credited with providing more street lighting, creating a park and reducing crime in the area. Governments create CRAs to target blighted areas with property-tax dollars collected from that area.

"We've changed the quality of life for a lot of people in the Spring Hill area," said Frank Bruno, chairman of the Volusia County Council and a member of the Spring Hill CRA. "We're trying to get more appropriations on a regular basis. I can tell you it's like night and day [there] from a few years ago."

Sewer to help business

The stimulus money could lead to more improvements in Spring Hill, such as helping to complete the second

phase of a sewer-system project. Some parts of Spring Hill — areas near the DeLand border — are connected to a sewer system. However, much of the community relies on septic tanks, making it unattractive to businesses.

"To enable development to go down there, you really need gravity sewer [system] instead of septic tanks," Pleus said.

The amount of money that any municipality receives from the \$787 billion stimulus package is a game of chance. Legislative fights over Florida's \$12 billion portion make the fate of Volusia's 50 projects and Spring Hill's upgrades even more uncertain.

What happens in Spring Hill could serve as an example of both the reach and limit of federal dollars. Nevertheless, some in the community hope that whatever Spring Hill gets will lead to long-lasting changes.

"I hope people will think of longevity and not just a Band-Aid," said Donna Banks, coordinator of the Spring Hill Community Resource Center. "Pay now or we're going to pay later, either by infrastructure depletion, social depletion or housing depletion. We've got to start somewhere. If not now, when?"

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GAYS

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in the city's statute that they say allows men — including sexual predators — to use women's restrooms. The pro-

vision is intended to allow transgenders to use facilities where they are most comfortable.

Law 'invites exploitation'

"The unfortunate effect of the law's wording is that it in-

vites exploitation by men wanting to follow women or children into restrooms for dishonorable reasons," said Jim Gilbert, spokesman for Citizens for Good Public Policy.

The group's Web site argues that "no law should make whole segments of the population feel unsafe. We believe that the safety of women and children in public facilities is a higher public policy priority than the identity politics being promoted by the Mayor and City Commissioners."

Legal assistance in drafting the amendment was provided by the Thomas More Law Center, a Michigan-based conservative Christian legal organization working with the Florida Family Association and the Christian Coalition of Florida.

ACLU steps up

The amendment has drawn opposition from the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, Gainesville city officials and the University of Florida.

ACLU attorney Shelbi Day said Gainesville is being used as a test case by conservative groups to roll back gay rights across the state and the rest of the nation.

"They clearly picked one of the most progressive cities in Florida to promote their agenda," Day said.

"We are trying to send the clear message that discrimination stops here."

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