

## Tree clearing begins for new Home Depot

By MICHAEL D. BATES Chronicle Reporter

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Heavy equipment is used to remove pine trees at the corner of State Road 44 and North Kensington Avenue in Inverness where a Home Depot is being built.

Last week, hundreds of pine trees dotted the landscape at the corner of State Road 44 and Kensington Avenue in Lecanto.

This week, they're gone - to make room for a new Home Depot along the northeast corner of that intersection.

But while some people are happy to have the big-box hardware giant close to home, and giving nearby Lowe's some competition, others worry about the congestion it is sure to bring.

Some who live in nearby Clearview Estates say they're worried about traffic, specifically a proposed access into the new store from Kensington Avenue. They fear their quiet, two-lane residential street could turn into a noisy, traffic-clogging nightmare of customers and delivery trucks.

Residents say Kensington Avenue already sees its fair share of cut-through traffic between State Road 44 and County Road 486. They worry Home Depot will tip things from busy to unbearable.

Joanna Coutu, who heads the county's land development division, said county commissioners in March approved a change to the Clearview Estates plan to allow an entrance to the store from Kensington. Since the land was already zoned for commercial use, no further approvals were needed.

On Oct. 14, the county signed off on the site plan and building permit. Construction can begin once the contractor finalizes paperwork and pays the required fees.

Preliminary work is already underway, including shifting a water line, adding a turn lane, and building a store driveway.

The property was also officially divided to create a parcel for the store. That step, known as platting, was approved by staff and recorded without a public hearing, thanks to a recent change in state law.

A utility service agreement between Home Depot and the county was supposed to go before county commissioners earlier this month but it got yanked from the agenda before they could weigh in. That agreement involved utility hookups.

To provide sewer service to the store, the developer needs to extend the county's sewer line from its current end point at South Highview Avenue along State Road 44 to the new site.

While a 4-inch pipe would be enough to serve just Home Depot, the county wants to install a larger 8-inch pipe to support future growth along State Road 44, according to a county report.

Home Depot has agreed to build the larger pipe, and the county will reimburse them for the extra cost of upsizing.

Home Depot started eyeing the property in late 2022 and submitted concept plans by mid-2023. By early 2024, the company was officially seeking rezoning and development approvals.

This will be Citrus County's second Home Depot. The only current location is over in Crystal River, off U.S. 19.