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## Program Set to Improve Lakeland's East Side

By Tom Palmer  
The Ledger

BARTOW -- Residents in an area on Lakeland's east side will be working with health officials over the next 18 months to see if they can improve conditions for the 5,500 people who live here.

What they learn could benefit other Polk neighborhoods, health officials said Wednesday as they unveiled the program to the County Commission.

The area, known as the Combee settlement north of Memorial Boulevard between East Lake Parker Drive and Fish Hatchery Road, has a number of problems ranging from crime to poor drainage, said Tom Parotte, a resident activist who is helping to organize community meetings.

"We're real excited," he said.

The pilot program is the result of a \$20,000 grant from the National Association of County and City Health Officials and was one of only eight awarded nationwide this year, said Tim Mayer, head of the Polk County Health Department's Environmental Health Division.

Mayer said this is not a case in which an agency is coming in to dictate solutions on behalf of residents. The agency will work with residents to find out what their concerns are and come up with solutions.

"We have some latitude," Parotte said.

He said identifying problems will develop data that can be used to qualify for any funding that becomes available to deal with the solutions.

There will be a number of community meetings throughout the process and the listing of concerns and possible solutions will emerge from those meetings, Mayer said.