

\$1 million allocated for Kupfrian Park

Alvin Peabody

Some much-needed help is on the way to upgrade one of Pensacola's oldest neighborhoods, thanks to a \$1 million allocation that will go toward new sidewalks, lighting and an improved drainage system in the Kupfrian Park community.

With money from the local option sales tax, the Escambia County Commission has approved the project, which will cover a four-block area along Avery Street, between Pace Boulevard and J Street. The project will take two years to complete, said Joy Blackmon of the county's planning and engineering department.

"We're already in the design stage and hope to have that completed soon," Blackmon said. "We understand that flooding is a huge problem in the Avery Street area."

Improved drainage always has been a top concern for residents of Kupfrian Park, which lies within the county's Brownsville and Englewood community redevelopment districts.

The Rev. Tony Aikens of the 150-member Park Place Baptist Church described the new project as a "good investment" by the county in homeowners' safety.

"Having an adequate drainage system in the area is long overdue," said Aikens, a nine-year Kupfrian Park resident whose church is located at 1610 W. Lakeview Ave.

"Whenever it rains, the roads become impassable, and it's always likely that someone walking is going to get drenched by passing cars due to the lack of sidewalks."

Adequate sidewalks also are a major issue for area residents. The neighborhood, which spans more than 40 blocks near Baptist Hospital, is home to scores of senior citizens. Many of them walk or ride to nearby health-care appointments on broken or incomplete sidewalks.

"I know a lot of seniors who ride their scooters in the middle of the street because of unsafe sidewalks," said Andrew English, a former longtime Avery Street resident who still owns rental property in the area.

Residents also are being polled on whether they would like to switch from septic tanks to public sewer, said Mary Beverly, the Escambia County Health Department's coordinator for environmental health.

"Many of the houses in the Kupfrian Park community are old and on septic tanks," said Beverly, whose department also works to help residents organize and identify problems with their environment, and then connects them with local governments for solutions.

"The poll will indicate to us what their preference is when the (Emerald Coast Utilities Authority) begins to prioritize for that," Beverly said.