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SW 24TH AVENUE EXTENSION

### Machen opposes road plan

There won't be any bulldozers plowing through a southwestern part of the University of Florida campus any time soon.

UF President Bernie Machen opposes a proposal to extend SW 24th Avenue - now a limerock road behind the Windmeadows Apartments - through a forested section of campus used by university professors as an outdoor teaching laboratory.

In a letter to Gainesville and Alachua County officials delivered Monday, Machen said he cannot support donating the right of way and other land necessary to extend the road from SW 34th Street to Archer Road based on what is known today.

But he's not ruling it out forever.

"The university would consider any proposal in the future if it was designed to make a significant difference in the quality of life in Gainesville and the university," Machen said in an afternoon e-mail.

On April 15, the UF Faculty Senate voted unanimously against the road extension. Any proposal would still be subject to faculty review.

Machen encouraged the county and city to move forward on the creation of a gridded network of streets west of SW 34th Street - a plan developed in 1997 during a community planning charette.

All of the roads are meant to help take pressure off other overly congested roads in the area, including Archer Road, 34th Street and SW 20th Avenue.

Plans are already in the works to reconstruct SW 24th Avenue west of SW 34th Street as a two-lane, divided segment.

The eastern extension of SW 24th Avenue had been proposed as part of a long-term transportation plan to alleviate gridlock at the intersection of 24th Avenue and SW 34th Street.

The extension, however, got pushed ahead on a priority list after developer Clark Butler announced plans to build Butler Plaza North on 100 acres just north of the existing Butler Plaza shopping center. He has already closed the Windmeadows Mobile Home Park to make way for the future development.

County planners have told him he would not be able to build the center unless some major solutions were reached to deal with growing congestion in the area.

Bob Reller of Butler Enterprises said Butler still plans to develop a commercial shopping center but just what that will entail is unknown.

"I guess it means we will have to rethink our plans," Reller said. "We are constantly evaluating and re-evaluating them."

County and university officials said privately that Butler has been circulating a new proposal that depends on a series of internal four-lane roads that criss-cross the existing Butler Plaza and its new sister counterpart.

No formal plans have been submitted to the county.

With Machen's decision, the university's 46-acre Natural Area Teaching Laboratory has escaped potential destruction, and that's encouraging to Tom Walker, a professor emeritus of entomology and nematology.

Walker was among a group of more than a dozen professors who got together a decade ago to create the area as a teaching center.

"It's a wonderful decision," Walker said. "It means we will preserve an irreplaceable academic resource used by four colleges."

To read the full text of Machen's letter, go to [www.president.ufl.edu/mtpo040503.pdf](http://www.president.ufl.edu/mtpo040503.pdf).

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