

# Residents get sneak peek of future Shands Bridge

By Kyla Woodard  
For Clay Today

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Residents saw the plans for the new St. Johns River bridge last week. The \$595 million construction started in May to replace the existing Shands bridge.

The new bridge is a part of the larger First Coast Expressway project.

Community outreach specialist Sara Pleasants said the expressway project would help alleviate traffic on roads like Blanding Boulevard and provide residents with a new hurricane evacuation route.

"The existing Shands bridge is two-lanes, no shoulders, it's ... not great in terms of traffic capacity," Pleasants said.

Pleasants said the layout for the new bridge consists of two travel lanes on each side, emergency shoulders on both sides of the road, and a sheer-reduce path on the bridge's northern side for pedestrians and cyclists.

According to the Florida Department of Transportation, once the new bridge is completed, most of the Shands bridge will be demolished, with the exception of portions on both ends used for recreational

purposes. The recreational facilities will include barrier walls, parking, lighting, ADA accommodations and sidewalks.

Pleasants said that residents should not expect lane closures or major traffic impacts during construction.

"People will start to see activity taking place in the immediate term. The clearing on either side of the river and then they're likely installing a trestle for work this fall," Pleasants said.

The open house allowed residents to scope the project, ask questions and get answers. And with those questions came a division on the outcome the bridge will bring.

Some residents were happy about the bridge. Cindy Triay and Lorna Broughton said they weren't concerned, believing it would open up the area to new things.

However, some residents were concerned about issues that could occur before the bridge was finished.

Residents James Beyerl and Barbara Beyerl showed concern regarding the First Coast Expressway being completed before the bridge.

Construction for the expressway be-

SEE BRIDGE, 16



PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

Residents got a chance to see the plans and ask Florida Department of Transportation officials about the new Shands Bridge, which will complete the First Coast Expressway by 2030.



## Bridge

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in 2019 and will be finished in 2025. According to the Florida Department of Transportation, the expressway includes a new all-electronic toll facility from Blanding Boulevard to State Road 16 in Clay County, a new bridge over Black Creek and a diverging diamond interchange at Henley Road.

Barbara Beyerl said that having the expressway open before the new bridge is not the best idea.

"You need to not make using the First Coast Expressway a really favorable choice until the new bridge is open," Barbara Beyerl said.

James Beyerl said he is appreciative of replacing the Shands bridge. However, he said he fears the time between when the First Coast Expressway is complete, and when the new bridge is finished, will cause

safety issues.

"When the project is complete, that'll be great. But, the interim period when the expressway is built and temporarily dumps down onto the current two-lane bridge will add to a tremendous amount of increased congestion and possibly fatalities," James Beyerl said.

Senior project engineer Tom Woods said cars coming onto SR 16 from the expressway will mostly be the same, leaving not much of a difference between the current traffic being experienced now.

"Really, what we're doing is we're pulling the traffic up onto the expressway, and then they'll go across. It's the same cars, just coming from a different direction. It shouldn't get any worse, but it's not going to mitigate either," Woods said.


Woods also said the Florida Department of Transportation is contractually aware of how they will maintain the traffic.

"Most of the expressway, don't forget, is built outside of the current traffic. We



In addition to getting information about the new Shands Bridge, residents were able to see an artist's rendition of the bridge. Construction is underway with a completion date set for 2030.

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don't have to close a lot of lanes to build this," Woods said.

Construction for the bridge will conclude in 2030.

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