

Hwy. 98 intersections to get turn lanes

BY FRANKLIN HAYES
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Several intersections along U.S. 98 should be getting a facelift by the end of 2007. Recently, the Santa Rosa Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) approved a grant program that will give county government state funding to construct additional turn lanes on several high traffic roads. Soundside Drive and Nantahala Beach Road will receive northbound left turn lanes while Coral Street, Bayshore Road and East Bay Boulevard will receive southbound right turn lanes.

Commissioner John Broxson, whose district includes four of the five intersections, said he supported the measure but called the provision a "band aid." Broxson has been pushing for a traffic light on Soundside Drive, giving residents in the Santa Rosa Shores East and Knobby Knoll areas easier access to U.S. Hwy. 98.

"I know we've been trying to get some signal lights at these intersections without success. The DOT doesn't think they warrant a signal light at these

locations so this is an alternative I suppose," said Commissioner Broxson. The commissioner also added that he would continue to pursue a traffic light at Soundside Drive.

The area surrounding the intersection includes three churches, Concord Presbyterian, Gulf Breeze United Methodist Community Life Center and Good Shepherd Lutheran, and resident Betty Little believes a traffic light would make the intersection safer.

"Anyone familiar with that intersection would know that it's very dangerous, especially if you're going left. A lot of [residents] would like to see a light there because there is a serious problem," Little said.

County engineer Roger Blaylock said that his department recognizes that Soundside Drive "is a very busy intersection," but that the state grant program has a very specific scope of work.

In the spring, the BOCC received a letter from the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), regarding an FDOT traffic study, claiming that there were insufficient traffic levels on



The intersection of Nantahala Beach Road and U.S. 98 is one of several road crossings that should receive additional turn lanes by the end of 2007.

Soundside to warrant a stoplight. Instead, the FDOT recommended the additional turn lanes.

"We may not be able to provide enough to handle every peak hour turning maneuver, but it will allow free rights, when the traffic will allow... Each of the intersections will be

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evaluated to allow free rights when available," Blaylock said.

The five projects on U.S. Hwy. 98 are estimated to cost \$309,500, one half of which will be funded by the FDOT. Project designs should be complete by Jan. 31, 2007 and construction should conclude by Dec. 31, 2007.

TAX: \$19.2 million earned for county

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years, First District Courts have heard the arguments from both sides, ending last week with the Supreme Court refusal.

Charles Pack, chairman of the Navarre Beach Against Illegal Taxation Committee (NBAITC), said "There was no future in pursuing it any further. The Florida Supreme Court refused to accept jurisdiction, so we didn't feel that we should follow it any further."

When asked why the courts did not rule, Pack answered, "I have no idea why. They did not give a reason why."

"It's a fairness issue for the

people of the county as far as I am concerned" Brown says. "Proportionately, property owners on the mainland pay a great deal more tax than the beach leaseholders. The leaseholders have a 99-year lease with automatic renewal and then they are entitled to additional 99-year renewals in perpetuity. In my opinion; the leaseholders are the equitable owners of the property and now the courts agree. We are very closely studying land taxation as well because of the appellate court outcome and the Supreme Courts' refusal to take jurisdiction. The improvements and the land are on the same lease."

NELSON: Living one day at a time

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always ride on the running boards on the outside of the car. The streetcars were always full because there were not as many [automobiles] back then."

After raising two children, a fulfilling career with Union Pacific and spending most of her 66-year marriage in Nebraska, Nelsen moved to Florida in 2003, just in time for two of the worst hurricane seasons on record.

"We had tornados in Omaha, but there's really no comparison. There's nothing like a hurricane," Nelsen said.

In addition to the extreme

weather, the nonagenarian had difficulty understanding the native southerners.

"It was almost like a different language. The accent down here is much different from most places," Nelsen said, also adding that she is not fond of another hallmark of the south: grits.

Despite differences in culture and familiarity, Nelsen enjoys living at the retirement center in Gulf Breeze. In a biography produced by one of her fellow residents at Bay Breeze, Nelsen commented: "I like it here. They treat me nice and I'm just living one day at a time."

SCHOOL: Low enrollment means less funding

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translating to \$6,464 per student. According to a calculation made in the tentative budget, if the SRSD were paid the state average per student, the district would receive an additional \$8.2 million dollars in funding. Currently, the state average is \$6,799 per student, and Santa Rosa is the third lowest in the state. Escambia and Okaloosa

Counties are slightly ahead with \$6,487 and \$6,587 per student, respectively. However, Walton District receives \$7,076 per student.

"We can't tell if the slowdown [in growth] over the last year or two is because of the storms or what. I found it interesting that the trends seem to match pretty well. It's hard to say if that will continue or not," said Dillon.

INSURANCE: One option includes liability

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Windstorm Insurance Crisis Forum June 8, during which a panel of insurance executives and Commissioner Broxson heard from the audience how commercial policies are skyrocketing or being non-renewed. The forum was sponsored by the Gulf Breeze Area Chamber of Commerce in response to requests about windstorm insurance.

Pagan's family owned business was established 25 years ago in the unincorporated area of Gulf Breeze, near Tiger Point. Lou's Marine secured commercial property insurance, but the windstorm peril was excluded.

"We got exactly one quote, from Lloyd's of London and our deductible was going to be \$46,000," Pagan said. "If I had \$46,000, I wouldn't need insurance."

Pagan said the business is located in a steel metal building and never had a claim.

Crisis Forum, local business owners told the panel how their businesses cannot locate affordable windstorm coverage.

"We're drowning out here, and they want to throw peanuts. How about a life preserver?"

- Tina Pagan
Gulf Breeze business owner

The issue stems from a "wind-only" map that Citizens Insurance Company, the state-funded insurer, uses to determine eligibility for windstorm coverage. While the incorporated area of Gulf Breeze is covered, along with the barrier island, areas east of the city along Highway 98 are outside the wind pool, meaning they don't qualify for coverage by Citizens when other insurers deny them coverage.

Gallagher said people have a "love-hate" relationship with the windstorm pool.

"At first nobody wanted to be in it because the rates were too high," Gallagher said, and when private

companies deny coverage, everyone wants to be covered by the wind pool.

Gallagher said that every time the wind pool is expanded, it adds to the level of risk Citizens assumes, and then everyone gets assessed.

The state mandated this year that all insurance policy holders must pay an assessment to Citizens to help fund the state run agency, whether they are customers of Citizens or not.

Meanwhile, insurance companies are reluctant to do business in Florida after paying out premiums for storms in 2004 and 2005.

Gallagher said deregulating insurance and establishing a competitive rate market isn't an option because insurance companies "can't get the reinsurance to cover the risk."

Right now, Gallagher said there is a "large number" of insurance companies under supervision by the state's insurance regulation department.

"Companies either have to have the capital or reinsurance to cover the risk," Gallagher said, adding that reinsurance is hard to come by.

Gov. Bush is establishing a committee to address the lack of insurance for commercial buildings.

The process to rectify the situation is slow. Gallagher said the first step for area business owners is to "keep hollering."

Pagan said she was disappointed that some of the neighboring businesses didn't attend the forum because they have insurance.

"I don't know how adversely this is going to affect property values," Pagan said. "This is everybody's problem. One more voice, one more signature, one more call, matters."

Retaining walls arm property

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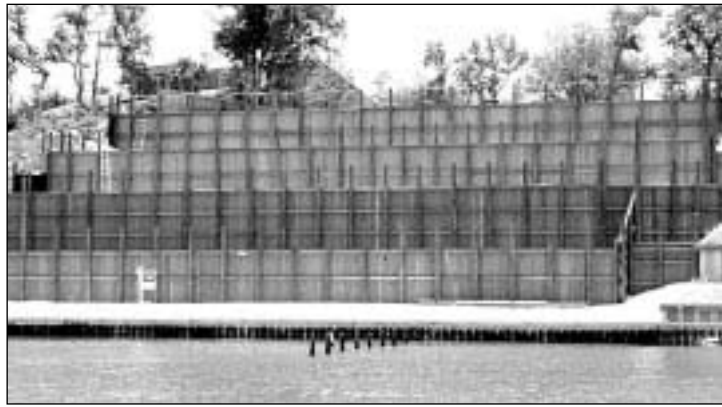
Following Hurricanes Ivan and Dennis, several waterfront homeowners on Highpoint Dr. constructed large retaining walls to thwart further erosion to their high-end property.

"A lot of the walls aren't really sea walls, but retaining walls especially on the north side of the city where there are significant bluffs," said Director of Community Services Craig Carmichael. "Unfortunately, it's a necessity. We don't like to see the shoreline hardened, but the city is sympathetic to property owners."

According to Carmichael, residents must first get approval from the Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers before requesting permission to the city to build a retaining wall. Once approved by the Gulf Breeze Development Review Board, the request goes to city council.

"We want to make sure they're complying with all the standards," said Carmichael.

Carmichael said that the process for the first resident to construct a retaining wall is lengthy, but once completed,



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Retaining walls such as this are being constructed along the north portion of the city

makes the job easier for adjacent residents to construct their wall adjoining the original one. The process usually takes around six weeks.

Although the retaining walls are intended to prevent erosion, Carmichael said there are drawbacks to the structures.

"We scrutinize them very closely. One, they cut off pedestrian access, and two, is changes the flow of currents down the beach," said Carmichael.

City Manager Edwin "Buz" Eddy says the retaining walls are necessary for maintaining the natural bluff landscape of the city.

"What we had after Ivan was

what is called slumping. Water hit the bluffs so hard that they actually began to slump down into the bay," he said. "The retaining walls will keep that from happening again." Eddy also indicated sympathy towards property owners.

"[Construction of the walls] is for the health, safety and welfare of the residents. The bluffs are also a significant geographical feature to the city."

Although there are no codes that require residents that build retaining walls to landscape the structures, Eddy said the property owners are planning to put rocks in front of the walls to lessen the hardening.

Calendar of Events

Today, July 27

Santa Rosa County Commission Regular Meeting, 9 a.m., Commissioner's Board Room, 6495 Caroline Street, Milton

School Board Budget Hearing, 6:30 p.m., 5086 Canal Street, Milton

Seminar: 90 Day Action Plan Workshop, 8 a.m., Gulf Breeze Chamber of Commerce, Chamber Conference Room, 409 Gulf Breeze Parkway, Gulf Breeze

Friday, July 28

No meetings scheduled as of press time

Saturday, July 29

No meetings scheduled as of press time

Sunday, July 30

No meetings scheduled as of press time

Monday, July 31

Budget Workshop, 5:30 p.m., Gulf Breeze City Hall, 1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze

Tuesday, August 1

Republican Club of Santa Rosa County, 6:30 p.m., The Republican Club of Santa Rosa County will hold its monthly meeting and Dutch Treat Dinner at Vinnie Rs Italian Restaurant 7552 Navarre Parkway, Navarre, Florida 32566 (Located just 2 miles west from the intersection of Hwy 87 and U.S. 98 in the Harvest Village) at 6:30 P.M. on Tuesday August 1, 2006. The Featured Speaker is Diane Scott, Candidate for Santa Rosa County School Board, District 1. For more information please contact Morgan

Wednesday, August 2

Santa Rosa Island Authority Board Meeting, 5 p.m., SRIA Administrative Office, 1 Via De Luna, Pensacola Beach

Governmental Affairs Committee Meeting, 12 p.m., Gulf Breeze Chamber of Commerce, location to be decided. Please call the Chamber at (850) 932-7888 for more information.

Budget Workshop, 5:30 p.m., Gulf Breeze City Hall, 1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze

Executive Meeting, 6:30 p.m., Gulf Breeze City Hall, 1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze

Thursday, August 3

Santa Rosa County Commission Regular Meeting

Same Time, Same Place

The South Santa Rosa Writers meet each second and fourth Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. at St. Augustine's Episcopal Church Parish Hall, 7810 Navarre Parkway, Navarre, west of Highway 87 adjacent to the Lewis Funeral Home. For further information, contact Nancy at (850) 936-6889 or email lilyismom49@mchsi.com.

Lamb by phone: (850) 939-2409 or by email: morganlamb@bellsouth.net

Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office Report

Information provided by the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office.

FELONIES

7/17/06
O'Connor Jr., Peter Rory, 62, W/M, 2600 block of Hidden Estates Circle, Navarre, driving on a suspended license

7/19/06
Barfield, Charles Anthony, 24, W/M, 2000 block of Navarre Park

7/18/06
Clark Jr., Keneth Harold, 46, W/M, 7000 block of Webster Street, Navarre, smuggling contraband into detention facility

7/19/06
Cheek, Russell Scott, 46, W/M, 5600 block of National Court, Navarre, fugitive from justice

Lane, Navarre, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, armed robbery

7/21/06
Fox, Angela Cheri, 27, W/F, 2200 block of Orion Lake Drive, Navarre, fraudulent use of credit card, \$300 or more

7/22/06
Correa, Christopher Ramon, 20, W/M, 1600 block of Stanford Road, Gulf Breeze, possession of marijuana, over 20 grams with intent to sell

7/23/06
Provost, Stephen Allen, 41, W/M, 100 block of Camelia Street, Gulf Breeze, battery, escape from authorities

7/23/06
Dominguez, Romel Anell, 27, H/M, 3300 block of La Leyenda

Court, Gulf Breeze, violation of probation

DUI

7/17/06
Brown Jr., Cecil Lawrence, 47, W/M, 6800 block of Yorkwood Street, Navarre, DUI and property damage

7/17/06
Palacky, Vladan, 31, W/M, 1800 block of Reserve Boulevard, Navarre, DUI