



Reshaping S.R. 207

By Colleen Jones
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Density of commercial development catching up with S.R. 16

State Road 16 and State Road 207 are two of the main arteries, or so-called “gateways,” that lead to downtown St. Augustine.

Parcel by parcel, over the last couple of decades the S.R. 16 corridor has been filled in with development, including two outlet malls, numerous hotels, restaurants and other retail.

Comparatively, S.R. 207 has remained less dense commercially.

As the pace of growth picks up, that is quickly changing.

A road once dotted with a few horse farms, faith centers and gas stations is now dominated by construction lots and signs advertising commercial land for sale, especially east of Interstate 95.

Over the last couple of years alone, several large residential communities have grabbed up large tracts of land off 207, among them Treaty Oaks, Deerfield Preserve and the Arbor at Valencia.

New hotels, restaurants and other commercial projects in the works promise to change the landscape of the area even more drastically.

“It remains to be seen if the S.R. 207 corridor will rival S.R. 16 in overall size and scope due to differences in landowners, developable acreage and zoning, among other things,” said Melissa Glasgow, St. Johns County’s director of economic development. “Over the long term, there certainly is potential for more commercial activity to occur along S.R. 207 if the economy stays strong.”

Of course, with more development comes more traffic, and county officials say they’re monitoring road volume and congestion with each application that is submitted.

Zoning on SR 207 allows for mixed use development, which can range from residential to office, commercial to industrial, and the projects currently proposed or under construction touch on almost all those areas.

Ground was recently broken on a 256-unit, multi-family rental community to be called Brisa at St. Augustine. The complex will be located off S.R. 207 at Lightsey Road. Also proposed nearby is a 62,250-square-foot self storage complex on Lightsey Road.

Homebuilder D.R. Horton has proposed construction of a 188-unit townhouse community on 33 acres of undeveloped land south of Epic Theatres on 207, with an access road off Rolling Hills Drive. Other residential plans in various stages of approval include two subdivisions west of I-95 on 207. Winding Oaks would encompass 250 homes, and another project called Black Gold would have 400 homes.

St. Johns Marketplace, near the St. Augustine Flea Market, has been rezoned to allow for business/commercial use and land has been cleared for possible hotels and restaurants.

In addition, an office/ commercial project for up to 300,000 square feet is being reviewed by the county as part of the Regis Lakes Planned Unit Development, south of Deerfield Preserve.

Also recently approved was a Busy Bee truck stop slated for 35,000 to 40,000 square feet just west of the I-95 interchange. And that is the only development project that Suzanne Kanchon, the county's growth development manager, said she was aware of that necessitated a traffic modification at this point.

Busy Bee has voluntarily agreed to install a traffic signal and turning lane at 207 and Deerpark Boulevard, which would also help alleviate traffic at the industrial park at that juncture, an area also poised for future growth.

"[S.R.] 207 is now operating within an acceptable level of service," Kanchon said. "We do see which roads are looking to reach or exceed capacity, and 207 is reaching some of those levels."

As far as a long-term vision of what the area might look aesthetically, Kanchon said the 207 corridor is not subject to the more restrictive guidelines an overlay district might require, other than those applicable to the county as a whole.

Glasgow said the investment St. Johns County is seeing in this area is positive for the county's overall economic development efforts.

"A majority of the commercial/retail projects approved and underway in the county are in the northern half," Glasgow said. "New projects along S.R. 207 will help bring a variety of products, services and job opportunities closer to residents living in the central part of the county."