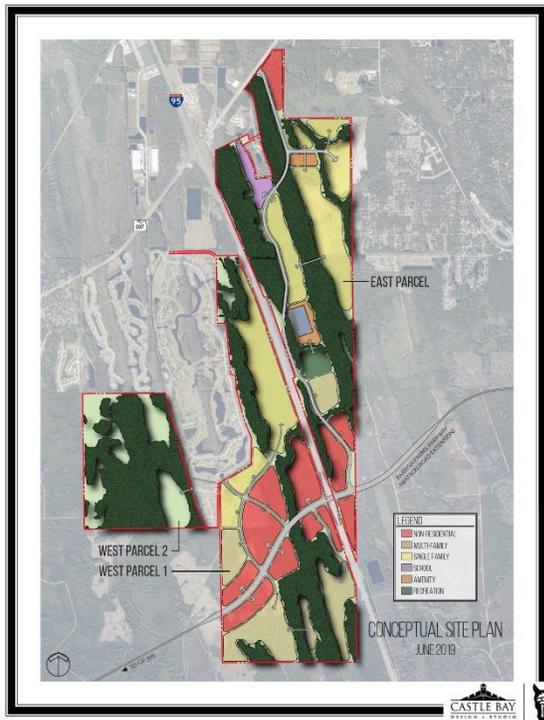


Thousands of homes proposed for southern St. Johns County



By Scott Sailer

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Master-planned Parrish Farms would be on both sides of Interstate 95 south of Florida 207.

Southern St. Johns County is the next development frontier and an area company proposes to pioneer it with Parrish Farms.

Heritage Development Co. of NE Florida LLC proposes a 2,782-acre mixed-use development on both sides of Interstate 95, south of Florida 207.

“Parrish Farms is the perfect opportunity to be at the forefront of development in southern St. Johns County,” said developer Christopher Shee, who also owns MasterCraft Builder Group LLC, which is a single-family homebuilder.

“It’s my neighborhood, I live here in southern St. Johns, so I wanted to do this correctly. I want it to be a positive impact,” he said.

Heritage Development is based in St. Johns County. MasterCraft builds in several St. Johns communities, including Madeira, Shearwater, TrailMark and Villages of Valencia.

Heritage Development has the proposed development site under contract to purchase.

Shee proposes Parrish Farm as a master-planned development to comprise:

- Up to 1,700 single-family lots and 2,000 multifamily units
- 4 million square feet of nonresidential uses consisting of 3 million square feet of commercial retail, 500,000 square feet of office space, 500,000 square feet of light industrial use, and 650 hotel rooms.

Heritage Development has applied to St. Johns County for a large scale comprehensive plan amendment, changing from rural/silviculture to mixed-use and residential B and C.

A companion application requests rezoning from open rural to planned unit development.

Melissa Glasgow, director of economic development in St. Johns County, described the project as a “game-changer for mixed-use development in the I-95/207 corridor.”

“The 207 corridor is a major entryway into St. Augustine and is generating substantial interest for both residential and commercial development,” she said.

Glasgow said that if approved, Heritage Development’s plans for 4 million square feet of commercial, retail, hospitality and industrial development “would be the largest concentration of commercial development in the central part of the county.”

Northern and central St. Johns County have experienced much of the growth in recent years.

“I wanted to bring a high-quality development to the southern part of the county,” Shee said.

The applicant’s representative is Kathryn Whittington with Whittington Law PLLC. The engineer is Matthews Design Group Inc.

Shee’s priority is entitling the property, which he expects will take up to two years, followed by engineering and permitting.

The 20-year project is proposed in two 10-year phases, depending on market factors.

The first phase could start in 2023. Development will begin on the northern part of the east parcel.

A major factor will be a new I-95 interchange between Florida 206 and 207. Shee intends to negotiate with the Federal Highway Administration, Florida Department of Transportation and the county for the interchange.

An interchange would help solve traffic problems by promoting a cross-county connection from Watson Road to the east with County Road 305 to the west, he said.

Shee can develop the eastern side without an interchange, but the western parcel is dependent on that access.

No interchange appears on the horizon for now. Hampton Ray, spokesman for the Florida Department of Transportation, said he was unaware of Shee’s intentions, and the FDOT website does not list any interchange projects on I-95 in St. Johns County.

Jeff Sheffield, executive director of the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization, said Wednesday he was not familiar with the proposal.

Shee said after construction of an interchange, “we could develop the balance of the property. We are looking way into the future with this project,” he said.

Both sides of the interstate

Each side of I-95 would include residential communities and supporting nonresidential uses. Commercial development would be concentrated near the interchange.

Plans surrounding the interchange allow for a potential medical center and commercial and business uses.

The overall plan includes 60 acres for active recreation; 1,058 acres for preserved wetlands; 27 acres adjacent to Otis A. Mason Elementary School for donation for a new school; and 24 acres for a county park.

East of the interstate, 1,152 acres are proposed for development. That does not depend on the interchange.

West of the interstate, pending the interchange, two parcels are planned totaling 1,630 acres.

One parcel, 1,161 acres, is on hold for development until an interchange can open up the property.

The other parcel is 469 acres. Shee wants to designate it for nonprofit organizations.

He intends to develop part of the property for “Parrish Ranch,” a faith-based ranch-style campus to focus on enriching broken families and underprivileged children by providing a stable home life. Parrish Ranch will be modeled after Seamark Ranch in Jacksonville, a rural agricultural setting where children learn to work on a farm, care for animals and cultivate fruits and vegetables to promote the health and well-being of mind and spirit.

Shee wants to memorialize the Parrish family, owners of the property for 80 years.

L.E. Parrish passed the property to his daughter, Marjorie O’Loughlin, whose husband was a former St. Johns County sheriff, Shee said.

Because they were equestrian enthusiasts and grew pine trees, Shee designed the community logo with a horse head and a pine tree.