



## Major development proposed in St. Johns County near SR 207, I-95

By Stuart Korfhage  
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Parrish Farms would include 3,700 homes; calls for new I-95 interchange south of St. Augustine.

What events have shown, and what Chris Shee believes will continue, is the continued residential growth of St. Johns County is inevitable.

He doesn't believe just because the growth happens in the right place that it will necessarily be done properly. That's why when it comes to thousands of acres near the Interstate 95-State Road 207 interchange, Shee felt he ought to be the one who will shape the future growth.

Shee, a St. Johns County resident and owner of Heritage Development Group and MasterCraft Builder Group, currently has an application into the county for a development that could include as many as 3,700 new homes, 3 million square feet of commercial space, 500,000 square feet of office space, another 500,000 square feet of industrial space, 600 hotel rooms, a new school site and more.

"I really wanted to bring a quality development to the south end of the county," Shee said. "I want to have something more cohesive."

The most ambitious part of the plan, which is still far from the approval stage, involves constructing a new interchange on I-95 between S.R. 207 and State Road 206.

If the proposal is eventually accepted, Shee said the new interchange would allow his development to have more commercial appeal while also helping to relieve traffic pressure created by his new development and the many others already built or approved in the area.

The new interchange could serve much of the southern part of the county. Shee proposes granting the right of way for Watson Road to extend all the way to the interstate, which would allow residents in and around the St. Augustine Shores development to access I-95 without having to use Wildwood Drive. That area itself is adding hundreds of homes in addition to the 1,000 homes coming at the end of the road on the other side of S.R. 207.

Also, the preliminary plan allows for Watson Road to extend all the way to County Road 305, which will eventually be part of the north-south corridor County Road 2209.

If the project is completed as proposed, there could even be an opportunity for Cypress Lakes to connect to the new development, creating a southern entrance/exit for those residents. That might give them another access option to retail/commercial offerings near the new interchange.

There are a lot of ways Shee could develop the 2,783 acres and make a profit, but he said he also wanted to make it a project that solves some problems rather than one that just creates them.

“I feel like I really know what the needs of the community are,” Shee said. “I want this to be done right.”

The property that Shee’s company has under contract has some frontage on S.R. 207, then runs behind Otis Mason Elementary School to I-95 and across it all the way to the edge of Cypress Lakes. From S.R. 207, it runs south about three miles.

The land has been in the Parrish family for about a century and is currently being used for silviculture. A timber lease runs through 2022. It’s also been used for equine activities.

Because of the history, the development is planned to be called Parrish Farms.

Separate from the main development area is another adjacent parcel of 460 acres that Shee plans to either donate to a non-profit or use to generate funds for a charitable organization that assists youths and families.

Shee said he wants to honor the family that acted as caretakers of the land for so long as well as to construct something that adds to their legacy. It’s been more than 2 1/2 years since he came to a preliminary agreement with the land owners, and he’s been working to add enhancements since then.

“I want everyone to be proud this is coming,” Shee said.

Although Shee has been working on this project for a long time, the development is still in the early stage of the approval process. It won’t be until the project goes before the Planning and Zoning Agency that there will be a clear idea of where the project stands with county officials.

However, Shee’s business has always been exclusive to St. Johns County, so he believes he has a good idea of what will be expected of the development if he’s going to earn approval. Much of the designated land use is rural silviculture and zoned Open Rural. That would have to be changed by the County Commission before allowing this to move forward.