

9.0 Public Involvement

9.1 Introduction

A Public Involvement Program has been developed and carried out as an integral part of this project. The purpose of this program is to establish and maintain communication with the public at-large and individuals and agencies concerned with the project and its potential impacts. To ensure open communication and agency and public input, St. Johns County has followed an extensive public involvement plan and established a project web-site allowing concerned individuals constant access to information and the ability to e-mail questions directly to project managers. In an effort to resolve all issues identified, the County has conducted an extensive property owner consultation effort and general public participation process. This section of the document details the County's program to fully identify, address, and resolve all project-related issues identified through the Public Involvement Program.

9.2 Public Meetings

A series of publicly accessible meetings have been held throughout the course of this project. The intent of these meetings was to offer the public and concerned individuals and organizations an opportunity to speak with County staff and members of the consulting team and receive the most current information regarding the project.

On March 2, 2004 St. Johns County Engineering staff and the project consultants presented before the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners (BCC). The purpose of this meeting was to present the material related to the upcoming project kick-off meeting to the BCC and answer any questions they may have about the project. Members of the general public in attendance were also given the opportunity to speak.

On March 15, 2004 a project kick-off meeting was held at the St. Johns County Agricultural Center. From 4:00 P.M. until 8:00 P.M., St. Johns County residents had an opportunity to review aerial photographs of the CR 2209 corridor. St. Johns County staff and the consultant team were available to assist residents in explaining the need and purpose of the study and answer questions. Those members of the public that spoke with staff generally were positive about the project and concerned more with when the roadway was going to be built. One written comment was received.

On August 4, 2005 an alternatives public meeting was held at the St. Johns County Agricultural Center. From 5:00 P.M. until 7:00 P.M., St. Johns County residents had an opportunity to review project related exhibits including the alternatives studied during the project as well as the preferred alternative. St. Johns County staff and the consultant team were available to assist residents in explaining the study and to answer any questions about the project and the alternatives being presented. As was the case at the kick-off meeting the year before, most comments and discussions centered on the construction dates.

On September 13, 2005, St. Johns County Engineering staff and the project consultants presented before the St. Johns County BBC. The purpose of this meeting was to present the preferred alignment to the Board and seek their approval. A representative of a major property owner raised questions about the preferred alignment and suggested that certain changes be made. The Board directed that the project staff meet with this property owner and develop an alignment that was satisfactory to both parties.

On January 24, 2006, St. Johns County Engineering staff and the project consultants presented before the St. Johns County BBC. The purpose of this meeting was to present the consensus alignment to the Board and seek their approval. A representative of the concerned major property owner informed the Board that the new alignment satisfied their anticipated needs and commended the County staff and design team for the cooperative spirit in arriving at the Consensus Alignment. The Board voted to adopt the Consensus Alignment and proceed with the next phases of the project.

In addition to the large scale public meetings described above, St. Johns County staff and the project consultants have had numerous meetings with individual property owners in an effort to address their individual concerns. Project specific information was maintained on the St. Johns County website during the course of the study.

9.3 Agency Coordination and Consultation

In order to better define and address the concerns of Federal and State environmental permit and review agencies, contacts were made in the form of telephone conversations and informal meetings. In particular, an informal meeting was held October 30th, 2003 with staff from the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The reason for the meeting was to inform them of the project

and seek their input on what concerns they have and what can be done to make permitting the project easier. Additional meetings with SJRWMD staff were held on several occasions to address potential impacts to conservation areas.