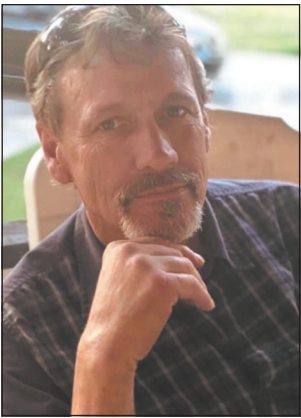




VETERANS Page A3  
Catchy up on news for and from  
local veterans and groups



LOCAL Page B1  
Crystal River man faces long  
recovery after life-threatening illness

CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

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Community pushback grows against sand mine deal

Local group demands transparency from FDOT, citing groundwater risks and potential waste of taxpayer funds

By MICHAEL D. BATES  
Chronicle Reporter

A proposed land deal by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is again facing backlash from a local community group that says it threatens the area’s drinking water and could waste millions in taxpayer dollars.

“(FDOT) should halt the acquisition and begin a transparent reassessment process that honors Florida law, protects our water and respects public trust,” the Stop the Sand Mine Committee (SSMC) said in a recent press release.

The grassroots watchdog group is asking for a full review of the project, one that includes public input, competitive sourcing, and a new environmental impact study.

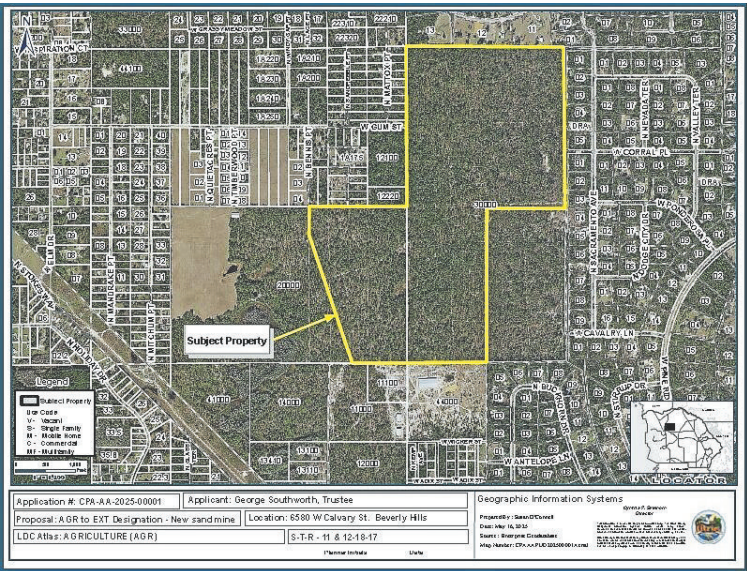
The group argues that the deal

has been handled behind closed doors. FDOT has not publicly disclosed the purchase price, and the committee says the department bypassed normal competitive bidding practices.

From the beginning, the SSMC has opposed FDOT’s plan to buy a 344-acre sand mine near Pine Ridge. It formed in response to what it views as a fast-tracked plan to turn a quiet rural area into an industrial sand pit.

The group has been organizing residents, raising awareness, and calling for state and county officials to reconsider.

The land sits in a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) designated floodplain and within the Kings Bay Outstanding Florida Spring Priority Focus Area, which is a state-recognized zone important for pro-



The drawing shows the location of the 322-acre proposed sand mine near Crystal River. The homes to the east are the Pine Ridge neighborhood. To the west is Crystal River area.

Citrus County Government

Environmental risks raised

The SSMC says the site is a poor choice for excavation, both environmentally and geologically. According to the group, parts of the proposed mine would go as deep as 2.3 feet above sea level in an area where floodwaters can rise between 8.6 and 12.8 feet.

They also point to FDOT’s own engineering reports, which show the land is made up of porous limestone, known as karst. This type of terrain is especially vulnerable to sinkholes and ground collapse.

The committee says the proposed mine could undo years of

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Bible Baptist Church finds grace after the highway

Suncoast Parkway expansion claims acreage

By MIKE ARNOLD  
Chronicle Reporter

When the Florida Department of Transportation told Bible Baptist Church of Crystal River it would lose its front two buildings to the Suncoast Parkway expansion, Pastor Thomas Reaves said, the congregation was devastated.

“Forty years. Almost 50,” Reaves said, pointing to the property on County Road 486 where he and his father had both pastored. “We built every one of these buildings. My dad was here before me. We raised our families here. So when they told us the road was coming through – well, we were dead in the water.”

FDOT has taken the front 1.75 acres of its property (which houses two of its three largest buildings, including its worship building). The church has until Nov. 1 to vacate those buildings. FDOT’s compensation for the property exceeded \$4.5 million, leaving the church with one large building and 5.2 remaining acres behind it.

The church, established in the mid-1970s and incorporated in 1976, had moved to the Lecanto property around 1978, starting with a double-wide trailer and clearing the land by hand. Reaves’ father, who took over when the church had just 18 members, led a two-decade period of growth, building the sanctuary and fellowship hall that still stand today.

For Reaves, who became pastor in 1996 after years as a union electrician and assistant minister, the church grounds were more than buildings – they were family history.



Photos by Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Construction on the latest phase of the Suncoast Parkway continues at the location where a bridge is being built near County Road 486 in Crystal River. With the construction numerous businesses and a church are being demolished to make way for the toll road.

“I raised all four of my sons here,” he said. “Some of our folks have been here since they were knee-high to a grasshopper.”

So when the Parkway project expanded its footprint and FDOT informed the church it would lose access to its own driveway, the blow felt personal.

“At first, we were told they’d only take the corner of our retention pond,” Reaves said. “Then one day we found out by accident at a meeting at the Armory that they’d moved the alignment. Now they’re taking our front two buildings. We’ve got \$500,000 in the



See CHURCH, page A5

Bible Baptist Church will soon be razed to make way for the latest phase of Suncoast Parkway construction.



U.S. Vice President JD Vance walks on stage Saturday to deliver remarks as part of the Marine Corps’ 250th anniversary celebration at Camp Pendleton, California.

How military’s ‘safe’ plan to fire munitions over Interstate 5 went off the rails with CHP cruiser hit

By RONG-GONG LIN II  
and MELODY GUTIERREZ  
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — It was supposed to be a boisterous event at Camp Pendleton celebrating 250 years of the U.S. Marine Corps that included a live simulation of a beach assault by sea and air.

The plan involved Marines firing high explosive rounds from M777 Howitzers – artillery used to launch shells in wars in Afghanistan and Ukraine – into designated ranges.

Federal officials last week insisted it would be done with “all safety precautions in place” and said no public highways would be closed.

But California officials expressed fears about those live rounds being fired over Interstate 5, which runs between the beach where the “landing” was taking place and the rest of the sprawling military installation.

Then, on Friday evening, the Marines did a test run without notifying state officials, firing artillery rounds over the I-5, according to the governor’s office – all while motorists

drove on the freeway. The California Department of Transportation captured the live fire on video.

Early Saturday morning, Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the closure that day of a 17-mile stretch of the interstate – from just south of San Clemente to just north of Oceanside – during the event, which an estimated 15,000 attended and included a speech by Vice President JD Vance.

Now, the California Highway Patrol is reporting that a cruiser parked

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