

A Sea of Change

By: Brandi Smith and Paul Chavez

The appearance of road construction equipment is not typically something we celebrate, but it is a sign of progress for the city of Seabrook, which has been watching and waiting for work to start on the expansion of State Highway 146.

"This project has presented a challenge for new development for the greater part of two decades," says Paul Chavez, director of the Seabrook Economic Development Corporation. "Now we can tell people, 'Yes, it's finally happening.'"

SH146 runs through Seabrook and serves as a direct route between Houston and Galveston. The highway has become so congested, TxDOT has expressed interest in overhauling it for nearly 20 years. Finally, in mid-February, Phase 1 of construction began.



"It feels good to finally have this project rolling forward because it's delayed many upgrades to existing franchises. There has been a lot of uncertainty about when it was going to begin and whether it was going to begin, quite honestly," Chavez says.

Certainty came in October 2015, when TxDOT, in partnership with the Federal Highway Administration, announced that it would widen SH146 up to 12 lanes from the current four lanes. That alone spurred a new energy in Seabrook, which is located just 30 minutes south of Houston.

"A lot of the businesses along the SH146 corridor have been relocated or shut down. Several of the buildings are getting demolished," says Chavez. "We're starting to see that happen at a much faster rate than earlier, so that's good. We're starting to see that progress."

TxDOT is also working with pipeline companies and with the city on relocating utilities. Right-of-way acquisition is also ongoing. Phase 1 will focus on widening the northbound Clear Creek bridge and building a new northbound frontage road. When that is done, crews will start on Phase 2: widening the southbound Clear Creek bridge, building a new southbound frontage road and constructing the bulk of a new express bridge. Then comes Phase 3, which will rebuild and raise SH-146's main lanes, and Phase 4, which involves finishing the express bridge. The project, slated to be finished in five years, also includes more greenery and landscaping.



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"We're still seeing very strong development interest in the area, especially in Seabrook, because people are starting to see things happen," Chavez says.

The North Planning Area – located on the east side of SH146 along Red Bluff Road – has seen considerable attention from developers seeking a large piece of contiguous property for development. The area just north of Red Bluff covers over 100 acres of land zoned for retail, commercial and light industrial uses. The North Planning Area is located near the Bayport Container Terminal and Port Road.

The Commons is a new retail site offering 30,000 square feet of space by Houston-based WMF Investments and is located directly on SH146, just south of the North Planning Area and in the SH146 -Main District. This trophy retail site is located directly in front of The Towers, a newly completed 416 unit luxury apartment complex. The Commons is currently seeking retail tenants for the center and a free standing corner pad site.

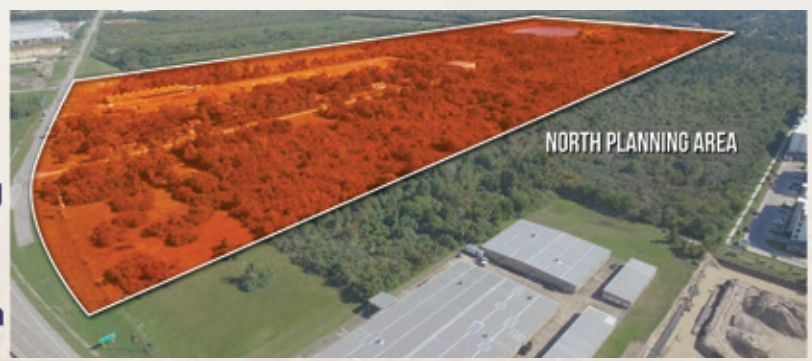
Already under development, the Seabrook Town Center is a 50 acre site dedicated to retail development on the west side of SH146. With three major access roads, including direct SH146 road access, the Seabrook Town Center is prime for independent and chain retail power players. Specialty grocery stores would thrive at this site.

Retail and small office users seeking a quaint and cozy part of town for their business will love the Old Seabrook District. Smaller lots are zoned for a mixed use of retail, light commercial and residential – the Old Seabrook District has a history of hosting unique and colorful businesses in the city. Additionally, the City will be working on a planning study for the district in late 2019 to map out more parking and additional sidewalks / bike paths in the area.

And finally, the crown jewel for development in the community is the Waterfront District. Situated directly on the water on the south side of the city, several retail tracts are available for an amazing opportunity in retail, dining development and tourism. In 2016 / 2017, the City invested a significant amount of funds towards the upgrade of Waterfront Drive. Developers will enjoy the prime Gulf views available at sites all around the area.

"We have a very aggressive incentive policy. It's also very open-ended, so if a developer comes to us with a unique situation, we feel that we have the flexibility to meet that," says Chavez. "We would be willing to work with them on a creative incentive solution."

Though it will still take several years for the SH146 project to be completed, now is the time to capitalize on the prime opportunities in Seabrook. Already, Chavez says he has seen real estate values start to climb and prospects seeking information on sites around the community.



Business Belongs in Seabrook

