

THE DAYTONA BEACH

NEWS-JOURNAL

Big changes are on the horizon for Flagler Beach.

NEW!

Pier.

Beach.

BIGGER!

STRONGER!

Seawall.

Hotel.

MODERN!

FLAGLER
BEACH

Will it lose its small-time charm? Page 16A



**FLAGLER BEACH'S
BIG MAKEOVER**

Sand, surf and skyline

Frank Fernandez Daytona Beach News-Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

Flagler Beach, long known as a sleepy beachside town, is becoming quite the happening place. • And over the next several years, the city, as it's technically called, will experience even bigger changes. • Its beach will extend by 100 feet thanks to more than 1 million cubic yards of new sand provided by the Army Corps of Engineers. • Its battered and shuttered wooden pier — the victim of repeated pummeling by storms and hurricanes throughout its nearly 100-year history — will be replaced by a tougher, taller pier perched on concrete pilings. • Its scenic A1A — one of the few stretches of the road in Florida with a view of the Atlantic Ocean — will get a makeover of fresh asphalt from the state Department of Transportation, along with some other improvements. • Its dunes near the south end of town will be fortified with a buried seawall by the state Department of Transportation. • And its skyline will change as motorists drive over the State Road 100 bridge to see a new Compass by Margaritaville Hotel rising in the heart of town next to Veterans Park.

But the improvements come with concerns for residents like Steve Meyer who is pleased the pier is being replaced but worried about the growing traffic.

"When we moved here back in 2018 from up north, we were under the impression that this was going to be pretty much a type of town that was going to stick to the original throwback beach town," Meyer said. "... As far as population and living in a small beach town without all the traffic, that's going to change."

Another resident, Steve Hoback, said he used to visit family in Flagler Beach when he was a child and always liked it, so a dozen years ago he left Jacksonville and headed south.

The two Steves were both on the boardwalk on a recent weekday, although not together, looking at the surf or talking with a friend.

"I've lived here for 12 years and it's changed considerably just in that time span. I mean there's already not any parking," Hoback said.

He said he was not opposed to progress, but added that Flagler Beach had "lost some of its small-time charm."

"Change is inevitable; what are you going to do?" Hoback said.

Chris Marlow, whose family owns the Golden Lion and the Next Door Beach Bistro in Flagler Beach, said he looked forward to the improvements, although he is concerned about the impact on parking which is already a challenge.

"Little bit, as a business owner I'm excited for the new positive changes and, as a resident, of course you are a little bit apprehensive," Marlow said.

But Marlow added: "Change is coming and it's all for the good."

The balance between upgrading and maintaining the 'Old-Florida feel'

Flagler Beach City Commissioner Jane Mealy has served on the commission for 18 years and has seen the growth in town.

"That's always been the challenge: how to upgrade certain things and fix certain things and try to maintain the Old-Florida feel," Mealy said. "I think once all those projects are done we will still look like Flagler Beach, although it will be crowded."

Mealy said that parking was a tough problem.

"I don't know how we alleviate it," she said.

Paid parking has been considered but she said parking is paid in St. Augustine and it's still difficult to find a spot. She also said paid parking might prompt more drivers to park in residential areas.

A couple enjoys a stroll along the Flagler Beach boardwalk on May 30. Big changes are coming to what was once a sleepy beach town. A new pier is expected to open in 2026, a new Compass by Margaritaville Hotel is being built next to Veterans Park, the Army Corps of Engineers is widening the beach and the Florida Department of Transportation is working on a project to improve A1A.

PHOTO BY NIGEL COOK/NEWS-JOURNAL;

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID ANESTA/USA TODAY NETWORK

Crews work on a Florida Department of Transportation project to install a buried seawall in south Flagler Beach. The seawall will protect A1A, businesses and homes from ocean flooding.



A seawall to protect A1A

The Florida Department of Transportation began work in April on the first of two buried seawalls for the State Road A1A Resiliency Project. The walls will protect A1A in Flagler County and northern Volusia County.

John Tyler, the District 5 secretary for the Florida Department of Transportation, read from a prepared statement at a June press conference in Flagler Beach.

"This is one of the longest, continuous sections of A1A where local residents and visitors alike enjoy unobstructed views of the Atlantic Ocean," Tyler said. "As much as we love the view, A1A's close proximity to the dunes also makes it vulnerable to storms."

He said that FDOT has spent millions of dollars over decades repairing storm damage along this part of A1A.

He also said FDOT came together with the community and other agencies to protect A1A.

"These new seawalls will allow the creation of a new dune providing a healthy sea turtle habitat while also protecting the roadway," Tyler said. "... together these projects will strengthen A1A to be a safe, reliable corridor long into the future."

FDOT is building a secant wall that will start near the water tower at South Central Avenue and run south into Volusia County, stopping about half-mile north of High Bridge Road.

The work includes "hauling in sand to widen and level the top of the dune to prepare for the drilling needed for the seawall," according to the FDOT. Crews must also remove the old rock revetment. Workers then start building the guide wall. Crews will then begin drilling the piles.

Later this year FDOT will start a resurfacing project on A1A from South Eighth Street to North 18th Street in Flagler Beach. That project will include upgrading some existing midblock crossings by adding pedestrian hybrid beacons. Pedestrian curb ramps will be rebuilt to comply with current Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

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A bigger, better Flagler Beach

The Army Corps of Engineers and Flagler County, with some funding from FDOT, are combining to widen the city's beach.

The Army Corps of Engineers will add 100 feet of beach to a stretch from South Sixth Street to South 28th Street. Two Flagler County projects, with a funding contribution from FDOT, will expand the beach nourishment north to North Seventh Street and south to Gamble Rogers Memorial State Recreation Area.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers awarded the \$27 million contract to Weeks Marine for the 2.6-mile federal project area.

Colonel James Booth of the Army Corps of Engineers said the project will do a lot to enhance the area.

"We're going to move approximately 1.3 million cubic yards of material to get it on the beach that's going to come in from 7 miles offshore," he said.

The work will proceed in 1,500-foot sections starting in the south and moving north. The section being worked on will be closed, but people can enjoy the beach outside of that segment.

"But I'd ask people watch out; that's a dangerous

area inside that 1,500-foot section," Booth said.

Veterans Park will no longer be used as a staging area. Instead, staging areas will be at "Pebble Beach," which is south of High Tides at Snack Jack, and then at South Sixth Street.

"A lot of people will say 'Hey, this is going to be a great project for the beach,' and people who like to go out and sit on the beach and have a good time," Booth said during a press conference in June. "We all agree that's going to be an amazing benefit to beach nourishment project. But the Army Corps of Engineers see an infrastructure project; we see an engineered berm and a reconstructed dune that's going to project infrastructure behind it. Think of the homes that we are seeing, think of the business around us."

He said it would also protect A1A, which he called "a critical hurricane emergency evacuation route for the state of Florida."

Booth said \$27 million is a significant chunk of money.

"We appreciate Congress' trust. We are going to do this right," he said.

The Army Corps will replenish the beach four additional times, about every 11 years, as part of the project. The Army Corps also agreed to replenish the beach in its 2.6 mile stretch for up to 50 years if a storm or hurricane washes away the sand.



Tropical Storm Ian ripped 120 feet off of the Flagler Beach Pier. Construction for a new, larger pier is scheduled to begin in December and the pier is expected to open in April 2026.
PHOTOS BY NIGEL COOK/NEWS-JOURNAL

Replacing the iconic Flagler Beach Pier

The pier and the A-frame building at its base are part of the city's seal.

The pier has been a gathering spot for people to fish, tourists to stroll and locals simply to take in the ocean views since it opened on July 4, 1928. But it has been battered by repeated storms and hurricanes.

The pier was the launching point for the city's popular July Fourth fireworks show, which brought thousands annually to the beachside.

In the last seven years, the cumulative beatings from storms and hurricanes finally dealt the knockout blow: Hurricane Irma in 2017 damaged the pier; Hurricane Matthew in 2018 ripped off a 160-foot chunk, closing the pier for more than eight months while performing \$900,000 in repairs.

Once the pier reopened, the anglers and tourists returned to enjoying the fishing and the views. Then Tropical Storm Ian churned into the area in 2022 and tore off another chunk. The pier has been closed since.

The public is now blocked from entering the pier by fence. The end is torn off, like a huge sea creature took a

bite out of it.

"It looks so sad with the end hanging off the way it's been for a couple of years," Mealy said.

The construction contract for the new pier is scheduled to be awarded in September or October. The mobilization for the project is set to begin in November. Pier construction is scheduled to start in December. Construction will run through all of 2025. It is currently scheduled to open in April 2026.

Probably no place will have a better view of the construction of the new pier than the Funky Pelican, the restaurant that sits in the A-frame building at the base of the pier. The restaurant will remain open throughout construction, said Marshall Davis, the general manager.

He said the eatery expects some business from people who want to get a view of the new pier being built.

"But it sounds like this is going to be a couple of months of some very loud shaking-of-the-building-type stuff," Davis said. "But that should be just a small portion of the construction. We do expect some of those days to be rougher than others."

But when the new pier is open, it should be great for business.

"I will say that we are pretty excited for the new pier because once it is built, I do believe it will have a huge impact on our business and the amount of people it will bring to the area," Davis said. "Suffering through the con-

struction is one thing, but afterward I think we are all excited."

He said, though, more people in town will mean more parking issues. He said that on busy holiday weekends, customers and employees alike are having to arrive 45 to 50 minutes early to find parking within six to eight blocks.

Meyer, the resident, said building a new pier is wiser than continuing to pour money into the often-damaged wooden pier.

"Every time we get some, it doesn't even have to be a hurricane, a nor'easter will come and tear up the pier ... I think it's a good idea what they're doing with the pier," Meyer said.

The new \$18 million structure will be funded largely by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The new pier will be stronger, supported by concrete pilings as opposed to the wooden pilings used for the previous pier.

The first 100 feet of the existing wooden pier will be preserved and reinforced. A gradual slope will connect the previous pier with the new 700-foot long pier, which will be taller and feature breakaway panels to relieve stress on the structure during storms.

The new pier will have electrical outlets for phones and "turtle-safe" lights, according to Moffatt and Nichol, the project manager. And, of course, it will have fish-cleaning stations.

The Compass Hotel Flagler Beach, a new Margaritaville Hotel, is being built on State Road 100 next to Veterans Park, just one block from A1A. The 100-room boutique hotel could open by June 2025. NIGEL COOK/NEWS-JOURNAL



Margaritaville coming soon

It will always be 5 o'clock at the new Margaritaville hotel in Flagler Beach next year.

The Compass Hotel Flagler Beach could open by June 2025, according to a story by News-Journal reporter Clayton Park. The hotel is going up along State Road 100 a block from A1A next to Veterans Park.

The 100-room hotel will rise three-stories and will have a restaurant which will be open to the general public. The cost to build and furnish the hotel is \$17 million.

The hotel will feature a theme based on the late Jimmy Buffett, a singer/songwriter who composed many popular tropical tunes about a relaxed lifestyle along the sea with the occasional volcano. Latitude Margaritaville, a 55-and-older residential development in Daytona Beach, is part of the business empire that grew from his music.

Davis, at the Funky Pelican, believes the new Marga-

ritaville hotel, like the pier, will bring more customers.

"It's going to bring a lot more business to the restaurants around here, especially the ones within walking distance," Davis said.

The new pier, the new sand and the new hotel and other improvements are all good, but come with some negatives.

"There's pros and cons to everything," Davis said. "As a fan of smalltown life, it can be frustrating due to traffic and parking, but as a business person, it's honestly great for employees, for me and for business owners," Davis said. "Everyone is going to benefit."