



COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS IN OKALOOSA COUNTY

We are blessed to call NW Florida our home. Even though we live and work here in Okaloosa County, we often do not realize how fast our County is growing. We now have over 220,000 residents and will continue to grow with the many planned infrastructure projects. To keep up with this growth and hopefully continue to improve on the many amenities in Okaloosa, we have a number of projects coming to fruition in various parts of the County that are being provided by or through your Okaloosa County government. I thought it would be a good time to update you on some of these many outstanding projects taking place in Okaloosa County.

The property by Shalimar Bridge, on the southern end, became available some years ago. It sits across from the Eglin Federal Credit Union, and old-timers will remember it as Carmichael's Surf Side 7, "The Academy of Cultured Anatomy". Okaloosa County used tourism development dollars to purchase the property, and we are planning a fisherman's park including parking, restrooms, bait shop and boat docks.

On the northern end of the Shalimar Bridge sits what is colloquially known as "the Dowd property", which became available when long-time County attorney, John Dowd passed away. The County, in conjunction with the Town of Shalimar, has entered into a purchase agreement and an interlocal agreement, both of which have been signed. Shalimar is using their tourism development dollars, and we have current funding within the state budget which was recently approved by the Governor. The property is expected to close in October after which design will begin.

The intent is to make this a passive park with swings, picnic tables, and grills. Swimming and fishing will be prohibited in this park. The entrance off the Shalimar Bridge on Hwy 85 will be closed in favor of a safer entrance from Clifford Street.

Eglin Parkway is beginning to see paving by Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). The portion from Richburg and 12th over the Shalimar Bridge will be completed first.

Our new south end Ag Extension Building is open on Lewis Turner Blvd near the south end Courthouse annex extension. Turn into the Courthouse parking lot then turn right to access parking for the Ag Extension. Please stop in and learn about the various classes offered in this

location. If you would like to be a Master Gardener, now is the time to sign up for the year long coursework.

The Cinco Bayou Boat Parking construction project is under way. This partnership with the Town of Cinco Bayou will double the boat parking and add bathrooms to a very busy ramp. Improvements also include fencing, landscaping, lighting and security cameras. A second phase will improve the boat ramps and replace the boat ramp dockage. This project, currently under design, will make dockage more modern, functional and boater friendly, and is paid for by tourism development dollars.

The former BBVA Compas Bank building, at the foot of Cinco Bayou Bridge, now houses our Tourism Development Staff and was purchased using tourism development dollars.

The Rigdon Center, locally known as “the old fairgrounds” is undergoing a major renovation and expansion. The county is adding more than 3,000 sq.ft. of space across two primary event venues, featuring state-of-the-art technology throughout. The upgraded facility will include new restrooms, two catering kitchens and a new concession stand. Additional improvements scheduled to begin later this year include enhanced entryways, a covered walkway, a screen wall and landscaping.

The County is also working with the city of Ft. Walton Beach on a land exchange involving property near the former downtown hospital site. This exchange will create a larger, continuous parcel for the development of a major pickleball complex, expanding recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Brooks Bridge, named in honor of Thomas Brooks, one of the founding fathers of Fort Walton Beach, is making steady progress. Designed as simplified suspension bridge, it will replace the existing bridge that has served the community for 75 years.

The new bridge will feature three lanes in each direction, separated by a 10-foot median, along with 12-foot-wide multi-use path on both sides for cyclists and pedestrians. The east-bound bike path will connect to the existing photoluminescent bike path along Highway 98 on the Gulf side. Construction is expected to be completed in 2029, providing improved traffic flow, enhanced safety, and expanded recreational access for residents and visitors alike.

Southwest Crestview Bypass opened to motorists on May 1, 2026. This remarkable project was completed in phases and was a joint effort between Okaloosa County, the Florida Department of Transportation, Triumph Gulf Coast and the City of Crestview. This long-awaited project has already begun to improve traffic flow in and around Crestview.

The Destin Fort Walton Beach Airport (VPS) is officially the biggest airport in the Panhandle with more passengers than Pensacola and Panama City. We have over 50 direct flights to anywhere in the nation. VPS is a huge economic contributor to our county. We are proud of the impact on the economy and the contribution to our County.

Veterans Day, November 11, 2026, will be a memorable America250! event recognizing our 250 year history while honoring the service and sacrifice of our veterans. Please join us for a special morning featuring an inspiring guest speaker, a special ribbon cutting ceremony for the Women Veterans Park expansion, and the dedication of 4 new statues and several beautiful benches generously contributed by our community organizations.

Mark your calendar for 8:30 AM, November 11, 2026, inside the Convention Center. This is a celebration you won't want to miss!

It is an honor to serve as your County Commissioner.

My Sincere Thanks,



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