

# Local

## Cape-bound traffic eased in N. Fort Myers

Intersection is better marked, has helped flow

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Fort Myers News-Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

A new, better-defined intersection at Pondella Road and the U.S. 41 business spur in North Fort Myers may make things easier for traffic headed to and

from Cape Coral and other areas.

Last weekend, crews removed decorative paving stones that had marked the intersection of Business 41 and Pondella Road to the west and Cardinal Drive to the east. Earlier this month parts of the intersection were paved and traffic lanes and rules reconfigured.

It is the first significant intersection encountered by traffic coming over the Edison Bridge onto Business 41 from Fort Myers. Well traveled by motorists

heading to Cape Coral or southwest North Fort Myers, it is the scene of daily backups during heavy commuter hours.

Two clearly defined turning lanes were created on eastbound Pondella Road at Business 41, basically legalizing a right hand turn from the middle lane that many motorists were making anyway. As a safety measure, the road was designated a "no right on red" intersection.

The work saw the removal of a paving

stone circle that had been installed in the middle of Business 41 about 15 years ago.

Unlike the era in which the cobblestones of the early 20th century were paved over, the bricks were not consigned to serve as underlayment for the road.

"The pavers were harvested," said county spokeswoman Betsy Clayton in

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## Fort Myers Brewing details expansion



**Rob Whyte, right, watches with his team as cans are filled with their Fort Myers Brewing Co. beers.**  
AMANDA INSCORE/THE NEWS-PRESS

Brewery plans to develop a 22-acre parcel adjacent to its space in Gateway

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When Fort Myers Brewing Co. opened its doors in March 2013, its 3,000-square-foot facility housed four picnic tables and a short bar with eight beer taps. In the six years since, Lee County's first brewery has grown to more than five times its original size.

And it's not done — not by a long shot.

"I remember being stressed and worried that we wouldn't be able to grow into all 3,000 (square feet)," co-owner Jen Gratz-Whyte said.

"When we started, we thought our tap room would be open two days a week. We had no idea our little space in the back of a warehouse would become a destination in and of itself. And now this new space will allow us to build on that destination, while still maintaining our vibe."

On Thursday, Fort Myers Brewing announced major expansion plans that will grow its footprint to more than 40,000 square feet of structural space across 9 acres of event space on a 22-acre parcel of land. Artist's renderings of the new digs show an expanded beer hall, a massive new manufacturing facility, a curved stretch of road with ample food-truck parking, a "grand lawn" with a stage for live music, and a "tank farm" that will house the brewery's fer-



**Fort Myers Brewing Co. hopes to break ground next year on an all-new 9-acre facility adjacent to its location in Gateway.** COURTESY FORT MYERS BREWING CO.

menters and brite tanks.

Gratz-Whyte said the best part of the new space is that it's right next to their current one.

"It was really important to us to stay in Gateway," Gratz-Whyte said.

"As people got wind that we were looking at land and larger facilities, there were a lot of opportunities that presented themselves. But we pushed back saying we wanted to stay in our home neighborhood and continue to grow with the community that's been with us since day one."

The 22-acre parcel they plan to de-

velop runs between the current brewery and Daniels Parkway east of I-75 in Gateway. Gratz-Whyte and her husband and business partner, Rob Whyte, have had their eye on the land since November 2016, when they first had inklings about their exponential potential for growth.

But the property was owned by the Lee County Port Authority as part of Skyplex commerce park. It was only available for lease, which didn't interest the brewers. They asked county

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## 'I never voted for a mine,' says official

Lee Co. commissioner reassures Estero locals

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Lee County Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass attempted to reassure residents of Estero and surrounding communities that he would be against the approval of lime rock mines that would be too close to homes in east Lee County.



**Pendergrass**

Pendergrass spoke before a crowd at a forum on lime rock mining in Lee County hosted by the Estero Republican Club on Thursday evening at the Estero Park and Recreation Center. Estero Village Councilor Nick Batos also spoke at the forum.

"I never voted for a mine, I never had one before me, and I would not support one if it was not compatible with residential," Pendergrass said.

The Lee County commissioner was accompanied at the forum by several Lee County staff members including County Manager Roger Desjarlais and County Attorney Richard Wesch.

Wesch also tried to reassure the crowd that the county continues to have processes in place to properly evaluate mines in Lee County in the future.

"Do not walk out of here thinking the county has gotten out of the mining regulatory business," Wesch told the audience.

The event Thursday came just over a week after the Lee County Commission voted to remove certain lime rock mining rules from the county's comprehensive plan.

The 3-1 vote June 19 eliminated a required study of county lime rock supply. It also removed a map, known as Map 14, which designated where future mines could be located in an area of eastern Lee County.

County staff said in public hearings in April and June that eliminating the rules from the plan removed unclear language and could keep the county out of legal challenges

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**A proposal to allow limerock mining on an east Lee County site has been advanced by county commissioners.**  
NEWS-PRESS STAFF FILE PHOTO



# Expansion

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commissioners if it would ever be put up for sale. In December 2018, their request became reality.

The property went up for public bid that month. Gratz-Whyte, Whyte and their vice president of outside sales, Fred Malone, bid \$2.05 million, just above the minimum. In January they learned theirs was the only bid entered. But the purchase was far from set. The Port Authority had to work with the FAA to get approval to sell the land. On Thursday county commissioners sealed the deal — pending bank approval and closing, the property is Fort Myers Brewing's.

"I guess persistence pays off," Gratz-Whyte said, sounding relieved.

"We're just so excited to be able to talk about the project. It's something we've been holding onto for a long time."

Talk is really all Fort Myers Brewing Co. can do right now.

As Gratz-Whyte put it, they're in the "hurry up and wait" phase. Once they've officially closed on the land, they'll have to submit plans, and then wait for development orders, permits and all the many hoops that must be jumped through with a new build.

Gratz-Whyte said it could be a year or more just to get development orders in



From top-left, the event space, food truck area, the "grand lawn" and the "tank farm" is highlighted in an artist's rendering of the new Fort Myers Brewing Co. event space in Gateway. PHOTOS COURTESY FORT MYERS BREWING CO.

hand. She hesitated when asked about a general time frame for opening the new space.

Late 2020? 2021?

"A long time from now," she said, "let's just put it that way."

In the six years since opening, Fort Myers Brewing hasn't just exploded in size but also in capacity. Its original equipment could make less than 500 barrels annually. This year the brewery

expects to brew more than 12,000 barrels of beer, 99% of which will stay in Southwest Florida according to Gratz-Whyte.

In 2013 she and her husband had one employee. They now have 17. In 2013 they brewed four original crafts, now they've got more than 200 recipes in their repertoire, plus a month-old line of spiked seltzers that's already being distributed to more than 60 restaurants

across the area.

The new facility will be rolled out in phases, starting with the tap room and beer hall. When that piece opens, the partners plan to expand manufacturing into their existing tap room to help support the increased demand. Once the new project is complete, the brewery's current 20,000-some-square-foot space will be closed.

To put 40,000 square feet into perspective, that's roughly the size of your average Publix. Or about one-third the size of a Walmart Supercenter. In 2013 a facility of that magnitude was unfathomable to Gratz-Whyte and her husband.

But here they are.

"To create this in a way that allows us to continue to host big events for the community and continue to grow our business, that's always been the goal," Gratz-Whyte said.

"We can have live music, corn-hole tournaments, vendors, space where people can roam, set up their picnic blankets, hang out for a while. People do that now in our tiny parking lot. This will just makes everything and everyone a lot more comfortable."

Find Fort Myers Brewing Co. at 12811 Commerce Lakes Drive No. 28 in Gateway. Call 239-313-6576 or visit [fmbrew.com](http://fmbrew.com) for more.

Connect with this reporter: @abellwrites (Instagram)

# Traffic

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an emailed response to an inquiry. "The majority of them were placed on a pallet and are now stored at a Lee DOT site for future, to-be-determined use."

Traffic, sometimes moving, at other times stationary waiting for a light change, is generally heavy at the intersection, especially during the home-bound rush.

Pondella Road carries significant traffic headed to Fort Myers as well as Cape Coral

It's not the type of traffic that fancy street beds are designed to handle.

"Maintenance of pavers in high-traffic areas is more intensive than maintenance of a high-traffic intersection with asphalt," Clayton noted.

Roads were repaved from Business 41 a few hundred feet down Pondella to the west, and a similar distance on Cardinal Drive on the opposite side. The pavers were in a large circle in the middle of the intersection and were removed and replaced over last weekend.

County leaders launched an effort in 2017 to stimulate more commercial activity in North Fort Myers to help revitalize the area, which has seen significant business failures and commercial stagnation in recent years. The Pondella/Business 41 intersection forms the



Lee County Department of Transportation signal technicians install road signs on Friday 2019, at the intersection of Pondella Road and US 41 in North Fort Myers. JON AUSTRIA/NAPLES DAILY NEWS USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

northeast corner of the study area.

A report prepared for the county by DCG Corplan Consulting of New Jersey made several recommendations starting with improving the look of the district's vacant store buildings.

County commissioners put \$2 million on the table in February 2018. The first grant in the program was awarded in September, 2018, a \$75,000 award to the Merchants Crossing Shopping Center for a facade improvement program.



Lee County Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass spoke to residents about lime rock mining at a forum held on Thursday in Estero. The Lee County commission voted last week to change the county's rules on lime rock mining. BRITTANY CARLONI/STAFF

# Mine

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The county's proposed changes caused Estero councilors and many village residents to travel to downtown Fort Myers twice in the last two months to testify in front of the commission to speak in favor of keeping the mining rules.

They cited concerns about the potential for negative impacts to water quality, the environment and the increased development of sensitive lands in east Lee County.

Two applications for new lime rock mines in east Lee County — Troyer Brothers and Old Corkscrew Plantation — are working their way through the county's application processes.

More than 50 people appeared to be in attendance at the forum Thursday evening. Discussion between Pendergrass, Estero Councilor Batos and audience members, who had the opportunity to ask the officials questions, remained civil.

Batos, who spoke first, said the changes to lime rock mining rules in the county's comprehensive plan left him concerned about the quality of life for county residents.

"If we don't stop the direction we're going in in the DRGR, we're just going to end up with a mine-scarred, industrial area with thousands of dump trucks each day polluting our air and endangering our residents," he said.

Audience members, many who identified themselves as Estero residents, asked Pendergrass and county officials why commissioners even held a vote to change mining rules in the first place.

"What was the point of the amendment from the very beginning?" said Estero resident Barry Freedman.

In response, Pendergrass said the county's view wants to be able to defend itself from any legal challenges that could come with denying a mine application.

"We're trying to make sure we do it legally, so, when we deny this stuff, we win," Pendergrass said. "We're making sure we try to do it right."

At the end of the event, Batos said it is important for elected officials and constituents to respect each other despite differing opinions about the county's lime rock mining rules.

"Because we have differences, that doesn't make us enemies. We all should be civil with each other. Hopefully we will work for what the residents of Lee County want," Batos said. "Eventually, hopefully we will get that."

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**FLORIDA LOTTO**  
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26 ..... 14-20-33-40-42-48 (X3)  
6 of 6: \$8.5 million (0). Rolls over to \$9 million  
5 of 6: \$8,109.50 (10).  
4 of 6: \$85 (696). 3 of 6: \$5.50 (14,085).  
2 (with XTRA): Free ticket (44,291).

**POWERBALL**  
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26..... 1-5-16-22-54 PB: 24 (X3)  
5+PB: \$122 million (0).  
5 of 5: \$1 million (0).  
4+PB: \$50,000 (0). 4 of 5: \$100 (31).  
3+PB: \$100 (86). 3 of 5: \$7 (1,980).  
2+PB: \$7 (1,418). 1+PB: \$4 (10,063). PB: \$4 (22,901).

**MEGA MILLIONS**  
TUESDAY, JUNE 25.....24-33-45-47-61 MB: 17 (X3)  
5+MB: \$60 million (0). Rolls over to \$71 million.  
5 of 5: \$1 million (0). 4+MB: \$10,000 (1).  
4 of 5: \$500 (16). 3+MB: \$200 (50).  
3 of 5: \$10 (1,079). 2+MB: \$10 (954).  
1+MB: \$4 (6,741). MB: \$2 (16,642).

**JACKPOT TRIPLE PLAY**  
TUESDAY, JUNE 25 ..... 2-9-17-23-28-37  
6 of 6: \$1.5 million (1). 5 of 6: \$428.50 (37).  
4 of 6: \$21 (1,809). 3 of 6: \$1 (29,172).  
Combo10+: \$10,000 (1). Combo9: \$500 (9).  
Combo8: \$50 (139). Combo7: \$20 (798).  
Combo6: \$10 (4,169). Combo5: \$5 (15,554).  
Combo4: Free ticket (41,039).

**FANTASY 5**  
THURSDAY, JUNE 27 .....19-23-24-26-27  
5 of 5: \$0 (0). 4 of 5: \$555 (273).  
3 of 5: \$19.50 (8,210). 2 of 5: Free ticket (83,461).

**PICK 2, 3, 4, 5**  
FRIDAY, JUNE 28 MIDDAY  
5-4 .....1-1-4 .....8-2-6-9 .....4-1-3-9-3  
THURSDAY, JUNE 27 EVENING  
1-0 .....0-8-8 .....3-6-6-7 .....0-6-6-9-3

**CASH4LIFE**  
THURSDAY, JUNE 27 .....11-14-17-28-39 CB: 1  
No winners of \$1,000/day or week for life  
4 of 5+CB: \$2,500 (3). 4 of 5: \$200 (25).  
3 of 5+CB: \$100 (162). 3 of 5: \$25 (557).  
2 of 5+CB: \$10 (2,549). 2 of 5: \$4 (8,986).  
1 of 5+CB: \$2 (15,740).

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