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COVID-19 deaths rise, new cases fall

Lee, Collier report 7-day toll of 26, weeks after omicron surge began

Dan DeLuca
Naples Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

COVID-19 deaths in Lee and Collier counties are on the rise, weeks after the surge of the omicron variant began.

The two counties reported a combined 26 virus-related deaths for the week ending Jan. 20, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's COVID-19 Data Tracker.

That's five more deaths than the previous week's total and the most in a week since late October. There have been 1,901 reported COVID-19 deaths in Lee County and 904 in Collier since the pandemic began.

The jump in reported deaths comes as the numbers of cases and hospitalizations are stabilizing. Deaths can take weeks to appear in state and national statistics.

Lee Health, the largest hospital operator in Southwest Florida, reported six COVID-19 patient deaths on Thursday, making it the deadliest day of 2022.

Lee Health reported 22 deaths for the week ending Jan. 20, and 47 deaths from COVID-19 so far this month. That's the most since the month of September when 242 died during the delta variant surge. There have been more than 1,300 COVID-19 patient deaths at Lee Health facilities since the pandemic began.

"Everyone at Lee Health is deeply

See DEATHS, Page 5A



Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks during a press conference Jan. 4 at the Florida Department of Health-Collier County in Naples.
LONDON BOST/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

What big projects are coming this year and beyond to Southwest Florida?

Phil Fernandez and Bill Smith Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

The pandemic era drove Southwest Florida development and the economy to new highs. • With the accelerator mashed down to the floor in a year that whizzed by, records of all sorts have fallen. • A number of the projects entering 2022 emphasize mixed-use development: Folks want open spaces and don't want to go far to work, eat or run errands — so the thinking goes.

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Southwest Florida development is booming. FILE AND PROVIDED PHOTOS

E-retailer Amazon is opening one fulfillment center in Lee County to handle truck deliveries and is expected to unveil plans in 2022 for a major warehouse with quick and easy access to I-75.

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East Naples condo-hotel
A developer is moving ahead with a multimillion-dollar project. 1C

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Projects

Continued from Page 1A

And as e-commerce continues to take a chunk out of brick-and-mortar retail, the region has become a growing hub for logistics warehouses. You don't need to travel far in Lee or Collier counties to spot an Amazon logo.

The historic mass migration to Southwest Florida that leads the nation, coming as builders grapple with a supply line crisis and companies try to find workers to help meet demand, has drained the inventory of available housing, new and used. Homes are certainly at the forefront.

Here is just a sampling of the many, many development projects our news teams reported on in 2021 and will plan to continue to track this year and beyond.

Jimmy Buffett has found a home on FMB

In 1973, Jimmy Buffett first crooned "I Have Found Me a Home," singing, "yes, I found me some peace" after moving into an apartment 486 feet from Sloppy Joe's in Key West.

Now, Buffett has found himself another home for a Margaritaville complex with the August start of construction on a northern piece of Fort Myers Beach.

If there's smooth sailing for an enterprise that had traversed tempestuous waters prior to its approval, expect completion by August 2023.

Stretching Fifth Avenue South?

The most congested intersection in the city of Naples is slated for an AC Marriott as part of a concept for about five acres.

The goal has been to finish erecting it in late 2023 at Goodlette-Frank Road and Tamiami Trail.

With the Gulfshore Playhouse rising on adjacent land, some Naples leaders consider the projects important to better linking the main shopping stretch of Fifth Avenue South to the surrounding area.

It might be, it could be ... a huge Amazon warehouse in Fort Myers

E-retailer Amazon is opening one fulfillment center in Lee County to handle truck deliveries and is expected to unveil plans in 2022 for a major warehouse with quick and easy access to I-75.

Plans for a new warehouse complex at a 260-acre site off Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard in Fort Myers were set for a first hearing last month, only to be cancelled because the city's Board of Adjustment couldn't reach a quorum to begin consideration of the project.

Land use rule changes were approved in early December, bundled with other, far less significant projects. City council action on the project should come early in 2022.

New Skyplex development seeks to put jobs where the people are

Work on a new commercial complex near Southwest Florida International Airport was cleared for takeoff by the Lee County Port Authority early in 2021, with a mission of creating a modern commercial zone close to growing population centers.

Locating Skyplex on the grounds of the airport is a strategy to put new commercial space "where the people are" to provide easier access to a new employment center.

Planned for development: 870 acres for office complexes and high tech firms; 280 acres with runway access will be used for aviation oriented companies. The Lee County Port Authority plans to create distinct identities for various sectors of the complex.

Naples gateway to hotel, development

The Tamiami Trail and Davis Boulevard area is scheduled to usher in The Ellington, a 10-story, 125-room hotel topped with 24 swanky condos and the 15-story Aura at Metropolitan Naples, with its 56 units.

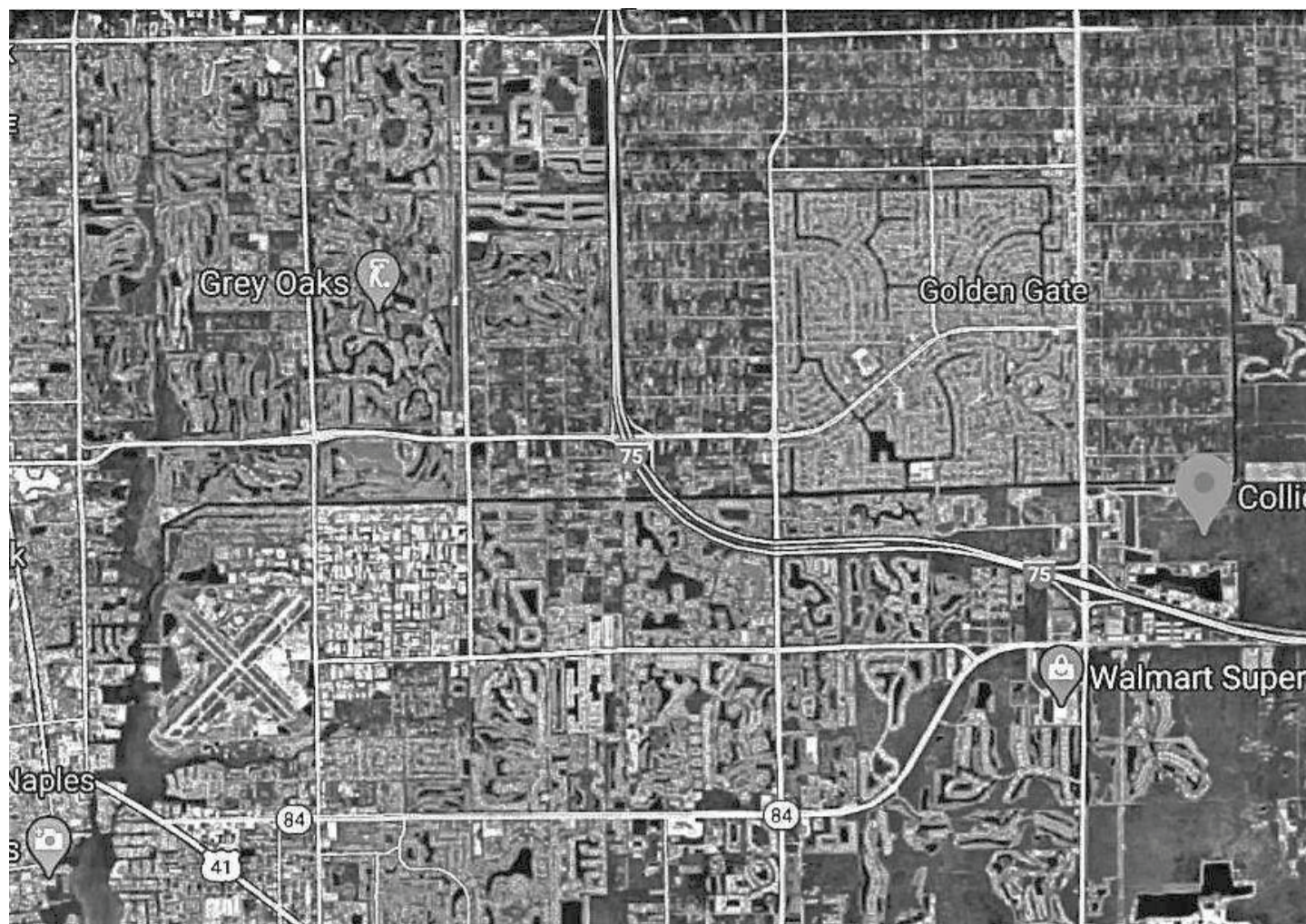
The completion goal for the 1.98-acre former is late 2023, according to Indigo Road Hospitality Group, which would be adding Naples to its portfolio of 25 of the nation's fanciest restaurant and inn addresses.

And for the 5.3-acre latter, the target is finishing by the beginning of 2024.

Big renovations coming to the Cape Coral Yacht Club

The fan favorite Cape Coral Yacht Club Community Park will be effectively closed for two years once construction begins this year.

The city approved a \$60 million expansion of the city's parks and amenities in 2018 through the Parks and Rec-



The Great Wolf Lodge is slated to be built off Collier Boulevard near I-75 and adjacent to the Paradise Sports Complex, which is marked on the right side of the map. IN THE KNOW PUBLIC RECORDS RESEARCH



Construction started in December on Grand Living at Naples, a senior living community at 15150 Tamiami Trail N. Completion target: summer 2023. The plan: a 241,071-square-foot, four-story community with 206 units.

PROVIDED

reation General Obligation (GO) Bond that would partially fund the various developments needed.

Constructions is expected to begin after permits are approved in April 2022.

Boom will bring back duplex homes to create new neighborhood in Lehigh

Duplex homes, which came to be regarded with disdain by some during the Lehigh Acres building boom of the late 2010s, were in line for a revival in Lee County in late 2021.

County commissioners approved rezoning for a section of Lehigh in the unincorporated county to develop a parcel with 10 duplex lots off Joel Boulevard at Glenn Avenue and Seventh Street.

The duplex construction is an effort to create a residential development with similar qualities. That is a difficult chore in Lehigh, where lots located side by side are often the property of distinct owners with different ideas about how it ought to be developed.

Extending downtown Naples with the emergence of Eighth Street South

That mixed use vibe has become the beat for Eighth Street South, which has been part of an evolution with updates to the street corridor, a hospital campus and replacements of aging properties.

A couple of the latest upgrades have been slated to finish by the end of the year including The Mark, which took the spot where the former Baker Center office complex had been.

The 24-unit The Mark on 8th can be found at 201 Eighth. And then 374 feet away there's the sprouting three-story 275 Building on Eighth, where a bank had locked into the ground floor with housing above.

Dunbar waits, and waits, for rehab for McCollum Hall; developer on the spot

Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Authority lost patience with a developer planning a major upgrade to the McCollum Hall building in Dunbar.

The iconic structure once was the place to be for members of the Black community who were not welcome in the dance halls and restaurants in the center of Fort Myers.



Artist's rendering of the potential for the Lee Port Authority's Skyplex when fully developed. The county approved the search for a real estate company to market 1,150 acres. LEE PORT AUTHORITY

A developer promised to get the project under way by Dec. 15 after missing previous deadlines. CRA leaders were ready to ask the Fort Myers city council to fire the developer and seek new ideas for the complex, an iconic symbol in Dunbar.

Naples Airport project close to landing

Completion of a \$7.6 million Naples Airport upgrade should come in February.

The original plan was to finish by Thanksgiving, but the supply chain got in the way, such as challenges with steel, according to aviation officials.

The changes will accommodate the growing traffic there. New stats this year by aircraft data specialists, Argus International and Private Jet Card Comparisons, found that Naples Airport for the first time has moved into the Top 10 of most departures at private U.S. jet facilities.

Hobby Lobby coming to the Cape

Coralwood Center, one of Cape Coral's most established shopping centers, will get new life as Hobby Lobby is looking to lease 50,000 square feet for a new store, the chain's first in Cape Coral to go with another in Lee County and two others in Collier.

After a turbulent period, business owners in the center are hopeful that the store will be able to fill the void that the previous JCPenney, which closed back in June 2020, left behind.

The lease has been signed, and the

store opening is scheduled for May 2022.

Fort Myers to become urban trendy; 'The Irving' plans 60 'very unique' units

Fort Myers waterfront is undergoing changes and one of the big additions approved for downtown in 2021 is "The Irving" the \$25.5 million luxury apartment building at the east end of Bay Street.

The city will provide a \$4 million property tax break for the builder, a team led by Rebecka MacFarlane Barney, daughter of developer Robert MacFarlane who has developed several properties in Fort Myers and Lee County.

At nine stories, the building will be engineered to provide river views and a view of the urban atmosphere of First Street. Including in the design work: As part of "very unique" units, developers have in mind a "sun study" to make sure the Irving's denizens receive the best Old Sol has to offer.

Some 'Grand Living' in Naples

Construction began in December of Grand Living at Naples, a senior living community at 15150 Tamiami Trail N., north of a Mercedes Benz dealer, Kane's Furniture and an adjacent restaurant-laden shopping center.

The plan: a 241,071-square-foot, four-story community with 206 units, including 166 for independent and assisted living and 40 for memory care. Work should be complete by summer 2023.

The region has been experiencing a surge in these types of developments.

Comcast extending cable system

North Cape Coral has been plagued with slow or unstable internet connectivity, but Comcast will bring Xfinity products and services to the northwest and northeast areas.

The project's estimated cost is more than \$14 million, with the city reimbursing \$500,000 to Comcast.

The expansion will complete Comcast's coverage of the city and is expected to take between six to 12 months, so look out for a completion date in late 2022 or early 2023.

Great Wolf Lodge hunt for land over

With a \$15 million value in public money for incentives, the Great Wolf Lodge is charging forward with plans for a 550-room resort that would include an indoor water park, conference space and multiple restaurants.

The attraction hotel has committed to opening in Collier County by Feb. 28, 2026 near Collier Boulevard off I-75. The total investment is estimated at \$234 million.

This is also the same intersection for numerous other projects including an Amazon distribution center and the county's Paradise Coast Sports Complex that is serving as a draw to other development.

USA TODAY NETWORK's Luis Zambrano and Brandon Holveck contributed to this report. Based at the Naples Daily News, Columnist Phil Fernandez (pfernandez@gannett.com) writes the In the Know column. News-Press reporter Bill Smith covers government and politics.