

Shaw Avenue widening planned next year east of Clovis

By Marc Benjamin



Lichen-covered farm relics — reminders of the heritage of Jerry Robert and his wife Rita — at their ranch on East Shaw Avenue. They've lived here for 47 years, and a now part of their corral is going to be removed to make room for the new widened Shaw Avenue project, which begins in 2017. JOHN WALKER — THE FRESNO BEE | [Buy Photo](#)

Jerry and Rita Roberts moved to their bucolic piece of the American dream east of Clovis 47 years ago and raised their four children. It was a time when the Clovis city limits barely pushed east of Fowler Avenue, more than three miles to the west, and their children could ride horses down the middle of Shaw Avenue, never seeing a car.

“They packed a lunch, go on their horses and they’d fish and be gone all day,” said Jerry Roberts.

Today, Clovis city officials are preparing to widen Shaw Avenue between DeWolf and McCall avenues. Construction is expected to begin next year, but meetings already have begun with residents about acquiring land for the expanded road. The city’s plans for growth, known as the sphere of influence, stretches to McCall.

The Robertses’ land remains in unincorporated Fresno County, but Clovis is stretching out to meet their acre fronting Shaw. About a third of an old horse corral is targeted to become part of the Shaw Avenue project. Since they no longer keep horses, the Robertses feel it won’t be too painful to part with it, Rita Roberts said.

“I wouldn’t be happy with it, but what choice would we have,” she said.

The city is almost reaching them.

Several hundred feet to the west, dirt is being being carved into streets and streetlights installed on farmland for new

homes.

The city of Clovis has about \$9.5 million through Measure C, the countywide half-cent transportation tax measure, for the widening. The project includes a Leonard Avenue underpass beneath Shaw. Including design costs, about \$10.3 million has been dedicated by the Fresno County Transportation Authority to the project, which also includes a landscaped median, sidewalks, landscaping, and two to three lanes of roadway in each direction.

It's not expected the funding will be enough to pay for the project, but Additional costs could be covered by developer fees, grants and possibly unused money from previous Measure C projects, said Renee Mathis, the city's engineering program supervisor.

The city has been reaching out to roughly 50 property owners along Shaw Avenue and have had a few meetings, said Steve White, Clovis city engineer.

Construction is expected to begin next year and continue into late 2017 or early 2018.

The roadway is not overly crowded now, but as home construction continues along the Shaw Avenue corridor, a newly widened roadway will be welcomed, and the sooner it's done the fewer the traffic headaches.

"The best time to do the work is when there aren't a lot of people living out there," White said.

A portion of the project includes construction of an underpass on Leonard Avenue, which the city proposes as an area of future commercial growth.

The underpass "will cut down on cross traffic along Shaw so you won't have interruptions," said City Council Member Harry Armstrong, who represents Clovis on the Fresno County Transportation Authority.

The underpass also is the entrance to the Loma Vista community, which is the city's southeast master planned community. The urban center will be a mixed-use area with business and high-density housing surrounding a 5-acre park site.

"It will link the the southern commercial area with the northern commercial," White said.

Much of the land along the south and north side of Shaw will eventually be annexed into Clovis. Hundreds of homes, an elementary school, a fire station and shopping are in the city's plans for this area.

Armstrong said people who live in the county, east of McCall, will find the drive much easier for work or shopping.

"There is a volume of traffic (on Shaw) that comes in from outside the city, so it will be a plus for the county, too," he said.

County officials will review the city's plans, said Alan Weaver, Fresno County director of public works and planning.

"Conceptually, we are in agreement with the project, but those portions within the county will have to get county approval," he said.

Some areas along the eastern edge of the project's borders will remain in Fresno County, stay in agriculture and rural residential/large lot homes. Generally, the area east of Highland remains in Fresno County, Weaver said.

The Robertses live just east of Highland. As he nears age 80, Jerry Roberts, who recently had knee surgery, said he would be willing to move because his property is becoming less manageable. He also is slow to make improvements to his home because he knows developers could soon come knocking on his door.

"They won't want the house, so it doesn't make sense to put a lot of money into it," he said.

Developers are already knocking on neighbor Richard Sassano's door.

"We are already annexed into the city," he said.

Sassano said his wife recently passed away and he hasn't been doing work around the 2-1/2-acre property, east of Leonard on the north side of Shaw, which won't be far from the city's new park site and shopping.

He attended a meeting with the city a few months ago and learned the city needs part of his land that reaches a sprinkler line, but he hasn't heard much more.

Sassano said he's not anxious to stay, and he and some neighbors are discussing selling their properties together when the time comes.

Seth Tutuoglu is renting his 30-year-old house on Shaw Avenue after moving about a mile to the west into Clovis at the suggestion of his wife.

He said developers are already working on the south side of Shaw.

So long as the offer is fair, Tutuoglu said, he has no problem selling part of his land to the city.

"You've got no choice but to sell it to the city, right?" he asked.

Contact Marc Benjamin: mbenjamin@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6166 or [@beebebenjamin](https://twitter.com/beebebenjamin) on Twitter.

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