

## Doll House not only house coming down

*Overland Bridge project to take all and parts of many St. Nicholas properties*

*By Susanna P. Barton*

The state Department of Transportation's eminent domain claims in St. Nicholas and San Marco reach further than the parking lot of The Doll House. Take a drive with St. Nicholas attorney Fred Iassac, and it becomes clear just how extensive the impact of the FDOT's project really is in the neighborhood.

According to the most recent version of the I-95 Overland Bridge replacement plan, 56 residences, six business and two churches will be impacted by the project. FDOT can take property via eminent domain it needs for a big project like the Overland Bridge replacement because it can show that it needs the property for a public purpose. A condemning authority like the FDOT must show it provided just compensation, looked at alternative sites, that it is being done in good faith and there is a necessity to get the land it needs.

Isaac and other attorneys already are working with property owners in the area to make sure they are receiving just compensation for their land or buildings. The FDOT is required to pay for an engineering report, a real estate appraisal and attorney fees under state law.

"They let you hire a lawyer, an engineer and appraiser — because the constitution mandates landowners get full compensation," Isaac said.

Whether that signals good



news or bad news for local property owners in a down real estate setting changes client to client, he said. Some property owners who have lived in their house for decades and had no thoughts of leaving, are upset. Property owners who are ready to move or reinvest their real estate dollars, are thrilled.

During a recent driving tour, Isaac points out flagged stakes indicating portions of various properties abutting I-95 that will be taken by the FDOT through eminent domain. He drives slowly by commercial properties where pieces will be taken — sometimes indicating it's the whole thing, other times showing how the FDOT just needs a sliver.

Familiar properties impacted include longtime business names like O'Steen Volvo, which will have to sell 50 feet on the back end of their prop-

erty, according to Isaac. For that business, the FDOT's claim means a lost sign, display and a much smaller facility.

The Public Storage next door will have to forfeit two buildings at the back of its property. VAB Collision will be gone altogether — made into Pond F along with Doll House and a nearby beauty salon. Baptist will lose some of its parking lot along I-95 and the old railroad tracks. And Tidbits will have significantly less parking when construction is complete. Customers will no longer be able to park along the interstate wall as they have in the past.

All this to make way for a major transportation construction project in San Marco. It is necessary because the I-95 faces structural deterioration. To save costs and time, the existing bridge will be

replaced with two smaller bridge sections and a filled earth section.

Does anyone ever win? Get to keep their property and thumb their nose at the state?

"That threshold is extremely low, maybe one tenth of one percent of cases are defeated," Isaac said. "In urban areas it's even less likely."

What is staying are two relatively unknown neighborhood treasures: Jerusalem Baptist Cemetery, a charming old cemetery near Southampton, and the nearby public playground at Marjenhoff Park. They'll stay.

And those who win may just be the property owners who get to stay. New access points to I-95 from St. Nicholas will provide better ways to get to the neighborhood. And that's always good for business.