

NO WAY OUT - NOWHERE TO GO

NOTICE UPDATED 9/8/25

When elected officials and public servants fail to keep the safety of residents front of mind, one can end up facing unnecessary risk, like the 2-year span of life-threatening risk the tens of thousands of residents of the combined Ridgemoor and Tarpon Woods communities will face, starting in June of 2026.

In January of 2024, Pinellas County Public Works (PCPW) and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) held their first public meeting at East Lake High School, informing Ridgemoor and Tarpon Woods residents that a plan was being finalized to replace the Brooker Creek Bridge along Ridgemoor Blvd. During the prior years of developing that plan, neither PCPW nor FDOT bothered to engage with residents about what could have been “options”. Although permits could have been obtained to build a replacement bridge to the north or south of the existing bridge, that was not done.

Another example of late thinking by PCPW and FDOT on this project was evidenced by the first communication had by them with the Fire Chief of the East Lake Fire Department, the leader of critical first responders to medical and fire emergencies. That first communication occurred only one month before the initial public meeting in January of 2024. In December of 2023, a representative of PCPW told Fire Chief Jason Gennero that it was the plan of PCPW and FDOT to totally demolish the bridge and, over a 1-year period, build a replacement bridge in the same footprint of the old bridge. This meant that the PCPW and FDOT plan would require all traffic in and out of the combined Tarpon Woods and Ridgemoor communities to traverse the congested two lanes of Tarpon Woods Blvd. Upon hearing of this plan, Chief Gennero explained that shutting down Ridgemoor Blvd would create a life-threatening situation for residents in the area because it would extend emergency response time by as much as 7 minutes, which was unacceptable. He explained that, if Ridgemoor Blvd was closed to traffic, his department would need to establish a satellite fire station within Ridgemoor to ensure prompt emergency response.

Upon receiving this last-minute information from Chief Gennero, PCPW and FDOT decided to alter their plan to totally demolish the Brooker Creek Bridge along Ridgemoor Blvd, and revised it to a plan that would demolish one-half of the bridge at a time, so traffic could be regulated in both directions over one lane during a 2-year period. If you are not familiar with the risks of partial bridge demolition procedures, the repeated flooding of Tarpon Woods Blvd., or the extensive community development in the area being assessed by the County, that sounds like a logical option. The only problem with that “logical” option is, it gambles with the lives of residents in the area.

According to PCPW and FDOT personnel, this bridge is being replaced because it is deteriorating. The creek that flows under the bridge has washed away much of the creek bed that surrounds the

bridge pilings. When heavy rains occur, the creek swells and the waterflow increases significantly. So, what will happen when the bridge is cut in half, the half of it that remains carries twice the traffic it would have otherwise, and we go through 2 full hurricane seasons that could create very heavy waterflow under the bridge. Also, it is not out of the question that the process that will be used to cut the bridge in half might undermine the stability of the undemolished half, and could result in the full closure of Ridgemoor Blvd.

The PWPC manager for this project advised that, the bridge replacement plan could be impacted or changed, depending on how things develop as the contractor cuts the bridge in half. That comment raised red flags, so we tried to get clarification from FDOT on that issue. FDOT has confirmed that they have no expectation of getting a guarantee from the contractor that the contractor's partial demolition of the bridge will not render it unable to handle any traffic. According to FDOT, the demolition process is not expected to render the bridge unable to carry traffic, but that isn't guaranteed. The fact is, unexpected contractor errors on bridge and road projects have destabilized roadways.

Now, let's add the other issues that ignore risk to the impacted residents. If the partial bridge demolition causes Ridgemoor Blvd. to be closed, the only other route out of the surrounding area for tens of thousands of residents is Tarpon Woods Blvd., a two-lane road that always floods during heavy rains as evidenced by the photos below taken of Tarpon Woods Blvd. after our last 2024 hurricane:



PWPC and FDOT does plan to widen a small portion of the Tarpon Woods Blvd. and East Lake Road intersection in an attempt to improve the flow of traffic from Tarpon Woods Blvd to East Lake Road, but the reality is that minimal widening of the intersection will do very little to alleviate the traffic congestion that will build along the two-lanes of Tarpon Woods Blvd that runs from Ridgemoor Blvd. to East Lake Road.

Logically thinking this scenario out further, during two hurricane seasons, there is no doubt that this area will be impacted by tropical depressions and hurricanes. That will flood Tarpon Woods Blvd. and, if the partial demolition of the Brooker Creek Bridge on Ridgemoor Blvd causes it to become unstable, residents will be prevented from evacuating. Even worse, emergency vehicles will not be able to access the impacted communities.

An additional factor brought into play by the County also ignores risk to residents. Plans are underway by an entity that purchased Tarpon Woods Golf Course to either attempt to build housing on some of that land, or to convert the land that previously served as the Tarpon Woods Golf Course into a Wetlands Mitigation Bank. Either project will require the new owner of the property to remove any contaminated soil throughout the footprint of the Tarpon Woods Golf Course. Experienced civil engineers advise that the top 2 feet or more of the entire golf course property will undoubtedly be deemed hazardous material because it has been saturated with pesticides over the past 4 decades. That contaminated soil will have to be loaded into dump trucks and removed. Why isn't the transformation of the Tarpon Woods Golf Course into whatever it will become prohibited while the bridge replacement project is underway. Untold numbers of dirt filled dump truck traffic will significantly add to congestion along Tarpon Woods Blvd. and the half-demolished Brooker Creek Bridge, assuming it is not damaged from the demolition process. It also seems logical that this added traffic of dirt filled dump trucks, if they travel along Ridgemoor Blvd., may further compromise the half-demolished bridge.

PWPC and FDOT should take the factors outlined above into consideration and change their plan for this bridge replacement project. If they refuse, at a minimum they need to dramatically shorten the time the contractor is given to complete the project. Why can't the contractor be required to perform work during extended work days (12 hours or more per day) and on weekends. Bridge contractors were able to replace large sections of the Sanibel Island bridge in 15 days after it was destroyed by the 160 mile per hour winds of hurricane Ian in 2022. The work needed to be performed to replace the little Brooker Creek Bridge on Ridgemoor Blvd. is minimal in comparison.

One might suggest these life-threatening circumstances may not occur, but why are public servants and elected officials taking that chance with tens of thousands of lives? It is not too late to confront the fact that the current plan is not the best plan, and it is potentially life-threatening.

Please share these details with your neighbors, with the officers of your HOA, and with elected officials. **Along with other issues, this bridge replacement project will be addressed during a meeting of the Council of North County Neighborhoods (CNCN) on September 15, 2025, at 7:00pm. The meeting will be held at the East Lake Library, 4125 E Lake Road. Both Senator Ed Hooper and State Representative Adam Anderson will be in attendance. PLEASE ATTEND THIS MEETING AND SHARE YOUR VIEWS ABOUT THE BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT.**

Bad things will prevail when good people remain silent. Please make a difference and speak up before it is too late.

