

## Ellis Road parcel key to growth in county

FLORIDA TODAY (Melbourne, FL) - Thursday, June 8, 2006

*Author: Staff, RICK NEALE*

RICK NEALE

Florida Today

MELBOURNE -- A nondescript 5-acre parcel off Ellis Road occupied by trees, brush and bugs could serve as a catalyst for transportation and development affecting hundreds of thousands of people across South Brevard County.

The benefits: A new Interstate 95 interchange, the northern terminus of the Palm Bay Parkway, and hundreds -- if not thousands -- of future homes.

The land in question -- coined "a valuable piece of property" by Melbourne Assistant City Manager Howard Ralls -- abuts the interstate within West Melbourne municipal limits. Melbourne administrators and Melbourne International Airport officials propose to team up and buy the property for \$750,000 from its owner, Endless Summer of Brevard Inc., which recently put the land on the market.

The airport authority will consider chipping in \$375,000 during a special meeting this morning. The Melbourne City Council is expected to vote on a purchase contract Tuesday. If the deal is approved, de-annexation from West Melbourne to Melbourne would likely occur.

Planners believe the property has multiple uses:

--- The site could become part of a future Interstate 95 interchange.

An Ellis Road interchange would serve as a Melbourne midpoint exit between Eau Gallie Boulevard and U.S. 192.

"This is a straight shot out from the airport. This has been in our plans for a number of years," said Richard Ennis, airport executive director.

--- The deal represents Melbourne's first physical step in creating the long-debated Palm Bay Parkway, City Attorney Paul Gougelman said.

Discussed for more than 15 years, the 21-mile route would stretch across pasturelands west of Interstate 95, helping relieve congested roadways in Melbourne, West Melbourne and Palm Bay.

"The plan is for the beltway to come around from the southwest and intersect at Ellis Road and I-95," Ralls said.

--- The site would create a corridor for Melbourne to install utility lines beneath the interstate, stretching westward across scarcely inhabited lands.

Specifically, lines could extend to a 255-acre, L-shaped swath of future single-family housing proposed by Spring Lake RV Resort Inc. One of the two corporate directors is William Thornburg, chairman of the West Melbourne planning and zoning board.

Thornburg visited Melbourne City Hall earlier this year, asking for water service so he can develop his 255 acres. He might try to de-annex from West Melbourne, then request annexation into Melbourne in exchange for utilities, Ralls said.

Thornburg could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

An adjoining property owner, Welchwood Enterprises, also wants to build 195 single-family houses on 111 acres south of Thornburg's land.

The 5-acre parcel is part of a 40-acre tract that was the focus of an ethics investigation involving former airport executive director Jim Johnson. The previous landowner, West Melbourne Industrial Center, sold the property to the directors of Endless Summer of Brevard for \$1.6 million in January 2005.

Johnson was a former West Melbourne Industrial Center shareholder. The ethics probe concluded he discussed a potential land buy with a developer that worked with the airport, and he failed to fully disclose his personal involvement with the land.

In the wake of the investigation, the airport authority forced Johnson to retire immediately last February.

Contact Neale at 242-3638 or [rneale@flatoday.net](mailto:rneale@flatoday.net)

---

What's next

The Melbourne International Airport Authority will consider the Ellis Road land purchase at 7:30 this morning in the airport board room.

---

**Edition:** Final/All

**Section:** Local/State

**Page:** B01

**Record Number:** brv29459054

Copyright (c) FLORIDA TODAY. All rights reserved. Reproduced with the permission of Gannett Co., Inc. by NewsBank, inc.