



November 6, 2008

Palm Bay plans land buy for roadway

*BY KIMBERLY C. MOORE
FLORIDA TODAY*

It's not the bridge to nowhere, but it is a roadway that currently exists only on paper.

The Palm Bay City Council is set to vote tonight on spending \$1.4 million to buy 160 linear acres from Lennar Home Builders and Bombardier Recreational Products that will help create part of the right of way for the Palm Bay Parkway.

It is a planned four-lane road that designers hope will alleviate traffic on Interstate 95 and Babcock Street. And city officials say they are getting a bargain-basement price.

"It's basically \$10,000 an acre," said Palm Bay City Councilman Milo Zonka.

Other officials pointed out that some landowners are charging the county between \$50,000 to \$60,000 an acre for vacant property north of U.S. 192 and west of I-95.

There is currently no funding to begin construction, but once the roadway is completed, it will connect South Brevard near Micco Road to Eau Gallie Boulevard in Melbourne. The road, referred to outside of the city as the St. John's Heritage Parkway, will run south of the current boundaries of Palm Bay and west of Interstate 95.

Zonka and Melbourne City Councilman John Thomas are hoping to go to Washington in the spring to lobby Congress for money to start building the road.

The price tag for the 19 miles of the project in the Palm Bay area is currently \$110 million to \$130 million. An additional \$35 million to \$40 million will be required to build an interstate interchange near Micco Road. This includes design, right-of-way acquisition and construction.

Assistant City Manager Sue Hann said factors increasing cost are fill requirements, along with wetland and flood plain mitigation.

"The parkway has not been designed yet, so these costs may change significantly as design details get more defined," Hann said. Despite the slump in the current housing market, Palm Bay officials are expecting another building boom when the market picks up again. Areas in southern and western Palm Bay have planned developments in the works. Developers and officials say the parkway is necessary.

"It is critical to an effective traffic circulation system, especially with the projected growth to the west and south," said Palm Bay City Manager Lee Feldman.

The city council will meet at 7 tonight at the City Hall council chamber at 120 Malabar Road.

Contact Moore at 409-1423 or kmoore@floridatoday.com.