



July 2, 2010

Parkway shifts into first gear

2-mile section near high school first up for construction

*BY SUSANNE CERVENKA
FLORIDA TODAY*

City leaders selected a 2-mile stretch passing Heritage High as the first section of a long-discussed parkway designed to loop around Palm Bay.

The project marks the first time officials will turn dirt on the St. Johns Heritage Parkway, known as Palm Bay Parkway in the city, moving the road off paper and into reality.

It also gives the public a second road on which to reach the high school, addressing a safety concern that arose when Heritage was built.

"I think it would be a signature start to this project if we can serve a legitimate public need," Councilman Milo Zonka said.

Overall, it will cost \$5.2 million to build a two-lane road from Malabar Road to Pace Drive, which would be extended to meet the parkway.

Palm Bay city staff will lay out the project in a proposal to the state Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, which will draw down a \$4 million grant allotted for the project the state's budget.

Under that grant, Palm Bay will be reimbursed as the city spends money on the road. The city also will use transportation impact fees, money developers pay to offset the added traffic their projects bring to a community.

City staff initially had recommended a different segment for the first construction of the parkway.

That segment would have extended Pace and Emerson drives to the new parkway, creating a loop that increased the flow of traffic in the northwest quadrant of the city.

That also would have helped developers build a proposed 60-acre commercial center that would have included retail and office space, City Manager Lee Feldman said.

But those on the council who spoke Thursday night said the Malabar to Pace route was the better option.

"I think this is the priority," Councilwoman Michele Paccione said.

Preliminary designs for the segment will be complete by April, which will allow the city to seek construction-bid proposals, Feldman said.

The city will also ask companies to give a cost estimate on building a section that extends the parkway to Emerson Drive.

Eventually, the parkway will extend to the city's northern limits where it will meet with a county-built section of road that will link to U.S. 192.

It's an important milestone for the parkway, which has been a top priority for Palm Bay and Brevard County, local officials say.

"It is nice to see a piece of the roadway is soon to be built," Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization director Bob Kamm said in an interview before Thursday's meeting.

He has been working on the parkway since 1988. "It's been a dotted line on a map for 20 years and after seeing it through the planning stages for so long, it's always gratifying to actually see it come to fruition."

Having one section of road under construction could help the city and county draw down more money for the parkway, said Tres Holton, a former Palm Bay councilman who is a consultant for a landowner who will benefit from the parkway.

"Being shovel-ready opens a lot of doors for funding at the federal level," he said.

"That's where the game-changer is."

Contact Cervenka at 242-3632 or scervenka@floridatoday.com.
