

# Heritage Parkway deal at a crossroad

## Deadline looms for growth plans

BY JEFF SCHWEERS  
FLORIDA TODAY

Development plans for land critical to the St. Johns Heritage Parkway have hit a roadblock with the state's growth-management and environmental regulators.

And time is of the essence. After November, the growth plans for the parcel owned by the Platt family could be put to a public vote. And neighbors have begun to mount public opposition.

Among the state's objections for the property between Melbourne and Palm Bay:

- Too many potential homes. The development is not justified by population projections.

- No analysis of the impact on traffic levels.

- No protection of water resources from storm runoff.

The holdup puts the entire project at risk while Brevard County commissioners and consultants for the Platt family hustle to win state approval before Nov. 2.

That's when voters will decide the fate of Amendment 4, also known as Hometown Democracy. The proposed constitutional amendment would require that all future changes to city and county growth plans be put to public votes in regular elections, normally every other year.

If the state doesn't approve plans by then, the Platt family's deal with the county will expire. That, in turn, could force Brevard County to pursue eminent domain proceedings to acquire right of way for the parkway around western Palm Bay. That would further delay the project and could multiply the cost to taxpayers of obtaining the Platt land from \$1.9 million to \$12 million.

"If Hometown Democracy is  
See PARKWAY, 9A

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# Neighbors worry their properties may flood

## PARKWAY, from 1A

approved, this will never get through," said County Commissioner Andy Anderson of Palm Bay, who worked for months to broker the right-of-way contract and the development plans linked to it.

Neighborhood groups have complained that development of the Platt property would worsen flooding problems.

## Moving population

Florida limits the total number of homes that cities and counties can allow in their jurisdictions based on available local resources such as water and infrastructure such as roads and sewer lines.

To strike its deal for the parkway land, the county plans to transfer surplus development rights for 3,000 additional homes to the Platt property from previously developed areas in South Brevard, records show. That swap would increase future development on the Platt property to 4,680 homes on 2,500 acres, according to proposed growth plans county commissioners have sent to the Department of Community Affairs.

In return, the Platts would give the county 47 acres of right of way through the center of the proposed development.

Consultants for the Platt family must now convince state regulators that their objections will be addressed, Anderson said.

"We're still going to build that road," he said. "We'll do whatever it takes to get that right of way."

## Status of St. Johns Heritage Parkway

Brevard County and Palm Bay are negotiating with landowners for right-of-way for the St. Johns Heritage Parkway. Acreage needed for the road is small, but development would expand across much larger parcels.

**Key properties needed for 'phase one' of the St. Johns Heritage Parkway:**

**1. Spring Lake RV Resort: 246.74 acres** William Thornburg, who owns Spring Lake, wants to sell the entire property to the county.

**2. Welchwood Enterprises Inc: 111.02 acres** Welchwood had planned on building 195 homes on the property. Still negotiating.

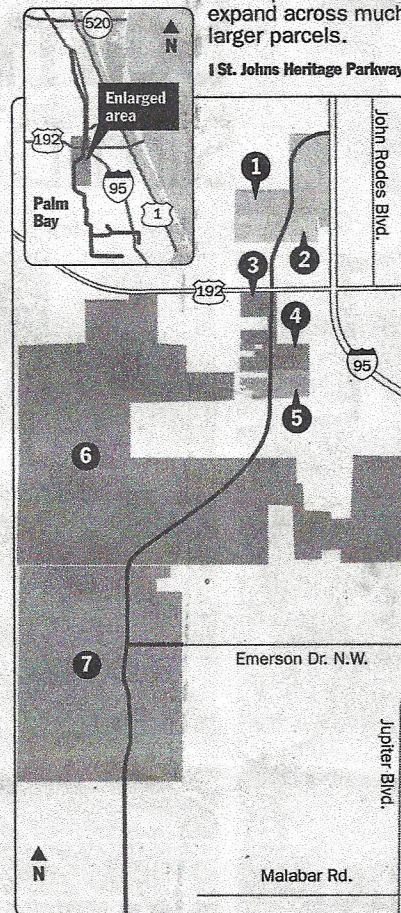
**3. 192 Associates: 99 acres** Controlled by William "Tuck" Ferrell, had planned an "urban village" for the area. Still negotiating.

**4. Walter "Toby" Platt: 87.69 acres** County needs 5 acres through the middle of Platt's land. Still negotiating.

**5. DB Midwest LLC: 81.09 acres** The county agreed to buy the land for \$975,000. The closing is scheduled for July.

**6. Platt Ranch: 8,193.4 acres** The county will pay \$1.8 million for 50.5 acres of the ranch.

**7. Palm Vista Preserve LLC: 2,024.75 acres** Palm Vista, which is controlled by Lennar Homes, sold 90 acres to Palm Bay for \$1.36 million.



Source: Research by John McCarthy, FLORIDA TODAY

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## Neighbors' concerns

To homeowners downstream of the Platt Ranch, the biggest concern is that new development near the future parkway would worsen chronic flooding in the area.

The Platt property acts as a holding basin for rainwater before it trickles into several canals, including the C-1, which runs to the Indian River Lagoon. But during periods of heavy rain, the water backs up into streets and yards of neighborhoods known as Police Foundation West and Brandywine Estates.

About 35 homeowners from those neighborhoods gathered in the Old Myrtle Church on Brandywine Road west of Interstate 95 on Aug. 22 to air objections to the plan.

"It's flooding, plain and simple," said Liz Hemenway, a resident of Police Foundation West for 25

years. "We will have water lapping at our front doors after a heavy rain."

County officials explained that the problem lies with the canals, which are overgrown with weeds, clogged or collapsed. The Melbourne-Tillman Water Control District thinks the canals work as they should, officials said.

"They do work, but only when the water level over the canals drop back below the top of the canals that the system works," resident Shirley Beasley said. "It's that time that it is out of the canal banks and into the neighbors homes we have a problem with."

Beasley also said she feared that once the Platt property is developed, "our community will become a giant retention pond when the water backs up in the canals."

Hassan Kamal, vice president of BSE Consulting, another engineer for the Platts, said they were sensitive to the drainage issue.

"We can't discharge any more in post-development than in pre-development," he said.

### 'Let's make a deal'

The state raised its objections after gathering feedback from other agencies, including the St. Johns River Water Management District,

the East Central Florida Regional Planning Agency, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Department of Transportation and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, records show.

Those groups pointed to a lack of protection of the water quality of the St. Johns River and Indian River Lagoon, a lack of specific and meaningful development standards, and maintenance of the adopted levels of service for roads and water.

The DCA also said the plan doesn't demonstrate a need for additional housing development in the Platt Ranch amendment.

Carey Hayo, a planning engineer with AECOM, a consultant for the Platts, said the state primarily wants the county to produce maps showing where the additional 3,000 homes would come. State growth planners want to be sure they come from areas with potential for redevelopment, Hayo said.

Commissioner Chuck Nelson of Merritt Island, one of two who voted against transferring additional development rights to the Platts, said that the move itself was inappropriate.

"That's not the planning process," Nelson said. "That's 'Let's Make A Deal.'"

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