

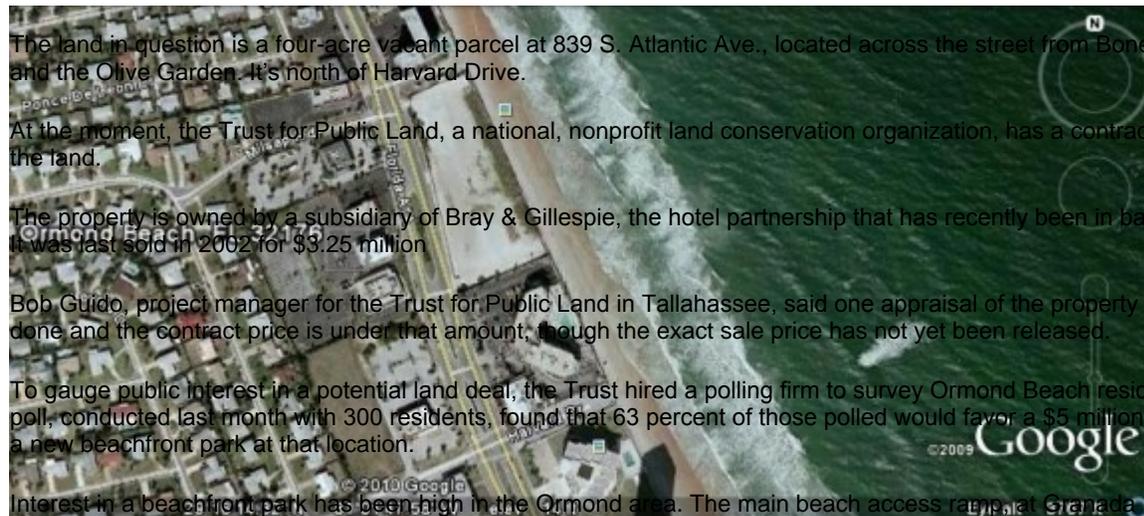
Ormond Beach voters to decide on beachfront land deal

Ormond Beach, Parks – posted by Ludi on May, 5 2010 8:58 AM

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Ormond Beach has its eye on a beachfront land deal that could give the city its first and only beachfront park. But the voters will have their say first.

The City Commission last night agreed to go ahead with more appraisals of the land and a referendum this year.



The land in question is a four-acre vacant parcel at 839 S. Atlantic Ave., located across the street from Bonefish Grill and the Olive Garden. It's north of Harvard Drive.

At the moment, the Trust for Public Land, a national, nonprofit land conservation organization, has a contract to buy the land.

The property is owned by a subsidiary of Bray & Gillespie, the hotel partnership that has recently been in bankruptcy. It was last sold in 2002 for \$3.25 million.

Bob Guido, project manager for the Trust for Public Land in Tallahassee, said one appraisal of the property has been done and the contract price is under that amount, though the exact sale price has not yet been released.

To gauge public interest in a potential land deal, the Trust hired a polling firm to survey Ormond Beach residents. The poll, conducted last month with 300 residents, found that 63 percent of those polled would favor a \$5 million bond for a new beachfront park at that location.

Interest in a beachfront park has been high in the Ormond area. The main beach access ramp, at Granada Boulevard, isn't accessible because red sand has made the beach too soft for beach driving. There are no beachfront parks, unlike in other areas of Volusia County and off-beach parking is available at a few locations.

"There is a big desire for this beachfront park and the opportunity has arisen for this to happen," Guido said in an interview.

Last night, the City Commission reviewed the poll results and several residents weighed in a potential land deal. Most people spoke in favor of buying the land, but a few people had criticisms – mainly whether buying beachfront property should be a priority in tight economic times when department budgets are being cut, whether the poll was done correctly and whether the Trust for Public Land has a stake in this, and whether the city should pursue cheaper options to buy land on the western side of State Road A1A.

Ormond Beach Mayor Fred Costello has been an outspoken proponent of getting the city a beachfront park and wanted to move forward with the deal, but the commission decided that an August referendum would be the best course.

In the meantime, the city will order more appraisals of the property, since, according to state law, the city can't buy it without several appraisals done.