

LIVE News 6 Evening

## LOCAL NEWS

# ‘We were misled:’ Commissioner asks to rescind controversial vote on Osceola Parkway expansion

Commissioner Emily Bonilla wants to reverse December board approval

**Nadeen Yanes**, Reporter

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A plan for the Osceola Parkway expansion project. (Courtesy image)



**ORANGE COUNTY, Fla.** – Orange County Commissioner Emily Bonilla asked her fellow Board of County Commissioners to rescind a controversial vote regarding the expansion of the

controversial Osceola Parkway.

The vote to approve the project was made in December, however, on Tuesday Bonilla let the Board of County Commissioners know of her intent to call for a vote reversal.

The Osceola Parkway Expansion Project has been 15 years in the making, according to the Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX), which is the agency building the road.

The plan would extend the toll road from State Road 417 at Orlando International Airport nearly nine miles east, cutting through the Split Oak Forest. It has environmentalists concerned. CFX officials said [the plan](#) originally had a road going right through the middle of Split Oak Forest, but said they’ve made changes.

CFX said the project is going to connect into SR 417 and to the Orlando International Airport, through the Lake Nona area, and then connect in the Split Oak area.

That plan was presented to the Orange County Board of Commissioners, however since the vote, which passed 5-to-2, with Bonilla voting against it, she said she learned the project was filed under the wrong state code.

“I was contacted by a constituent who was questioning the process that we went by and said that we had followed the wrong codes,” Bonilla said. “I read the codes and I could see how he thought that.”

So Bonilla contacted the Florida Communities Trust, the board that will ultimately have final approval.

“I contacted FCT and they looked into it and they came back and said we should follow the administrative codes that says ‘land swap,’” she said. “It seems like this land swap was done in order to get what they want really, a quid pro quo, it’s not required to do the road in any way.”

Bonilla is referencing 160 acres of land at the south part of the Split Oak Forest, which a revised plan by the CFX shows the toll road will be built through.

“I thought it was going to be part of the conservation land when this was all happening, turns out we were misled, I choose that word misled because they didn’t say otherwise,” Bonilla added.

According to CFX, however, there is no “land swap.” The piece of property, they say, is owned by

Osceola County and will still be owned by Osceola County, though CFX will be using it to build on.

“Osceola County is the owner of the land being considered for the easement to accommodate the Osceola Parkway Extension. Should Florida’s Community Trust approve an easement to allow for the construction of the Osceola Parkway Extension, this property would continue to be owned by Osceola County,” said Brian Hutchings, spokesman for the Central Florida Expressway Authority.

Ultimately, it will be up to the Florida Communities Trust to make the final call. But Bonilla’s call to reverse the vote, now set for Feb. 11, had environmentalists and activists hopeful at the meeting Tuesday.

“This comes down to reckless growth,” said Sally Baptiste, protesting the project. “They can’t be so reckless and we need to preserve some of this. We have a chance to kind of reverse what is happening here, so the Split Oak Forest should be protected.”

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



### [Nadeen Yanes](#)

Nadeen Yanes joined News 6 as a general assignment reporter in 2016. She grew up in Leesburg and graduated from the University of Florida. Nadeen has won three Associated Press Awards for her reporting on the Pulse Nightclub shooting, the trial of the Pulse gunman's wife and the capture of an accused cop killer, Markeith Loyd.

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