



**GOOD NEIGHBOR TRAIL
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (GNTAC)**
Joseph E. Johnston III Council Chambers
201 Howell Avenue, Brooksville, Florida 34601

AGENDA

January 23, 2025

5:30 p.m.

- A. Call to Order
- B. Moment of Silence Followed by the Pledge of Allegiance
- C. Introduction of new Parks & Recreation Director, Jared Marsden
- D. Selection of Chair
- E. Selection of Vice Chair
- F. Approval of Minutes – October 24, 2024
- G. Old Business
 - 1. Stewardship Reports
- H. New Business
 - 1. Merging with Parks & Recreation Board

I. Next meeting date: April 24, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.

J. Citizens Input

K. Adjourn

Two or more Council members may participate in this meeting. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, persons with disabilities needing a special accommodation to participate in this proceeding should contact the ADA Coordinator, no later than 48 hours in advance of the meeting at (352)540-3810. Meeting agendas and supporting documentation are available from the City Clerk's office and on line at www.cityofbrooksville.us. Any person desiring to appeal any decision with respect to any matter considered at this meeting may need a record of the proceedings including the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based, and, therefore, must make arrangements for a court reporter to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made.



**GOOD NEIGHBOR TRAIL
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (GNTAC)
MEETING MINUTES**

Joseph E. Johnston III Council Chambers
201 Howell Avenue, Brooksville, Florida 34601

October 24, 2024

5:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Morris at 5:30 p.m.

Committee Members Present: Chairman Vincent Morris, Vice Chair Mike Dolan, Board Members Eugene Kelly, Dawn Fish, John Beatty, Robert Battista, Richard Gant and Pat Brayton. Absent was Board Member Jan Knowles.

Staff and Others present: Parks and Recreation Operational Lead Christie Williams and Valerie Bryan, Recording Secretary. Also present was Tammy Heon, Manager of Tourism Development with the Florida Adventure Coast.

Moment of Silence followed by Pledge

Approval of Minutes – July 25, 2024

Motion:

Motion was made by Board Member Fish and seconded by Board Member Battista to approve the July 25, 2024 minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

Old Business

Russell Street Nature Area Management Plan

Chairman Morris has updated the Russell Street Nature Area Management Plan (attached) and would like the board members to review and come to the next meeting with corrections. If the committee approves, it will be recommended to go the Parks Department and then on to City Council to be added to the Parks Plan. Ms. Heon asked if this was a land management plan or an all-encompassing plan. Chairman Morris stated that it's a land management plan for the portion of Russell Street Park that is a nature area. Ms. Heon stated that Russell Street Park is now part of the Brooksville Main Street area. She is wondering how the plans would be reconciled at some point. Chairman Morris stated that this is why he put a plan together so that we could start to reconcile everyone's ideas.

Good Neighbor Trail Advisory Committee becoming 501c3

Board Member Brayton stated that if you become a 501c3 you will no longer have a relationship with the City of Brooksville. Discussion ensued about becoming a 501c3. Board Member Battista stated that we may need to combine with the Parks & Recreation Board and dissolve the Good Neighbor Trail Advisory Committee. Discussion ensued about combining boards. Board Member Battista recommended Chairman Morris appear before the Parks & Recreation Board to present the joining of the boards.

Motion

Board Member Battista made a motion which was seconded by Board Member Kelly for Chairman Morris to present the joining of the boards. Motion carried unanimously.

New Business

Florida Community Trust Report

Operational Lead Williams has nothing to report at this time, she is not involved with the Community Trust Grant.

Stewardship Reports

Christie Williams updated the board that the City is having a survey done of the property. Once the survey is done the stewardship reports will be submitted. The report will be published before the next meeting. Chairman Morris stated that we will table the discussion until the next meeting.

Planning for Upcoming Events on the GNT

Tammy Heon, Manager of Tourism Development for Florida's Adventure Coast updated the board on upcoming events. She believes Bike Florida will be starting their Bike and Bites rides again in January. She has reached out to the Director to confirm. Bike Florida is also bringing a three-day ride into the community, with lodging at Chinsegut Hill Retreat. They also have a couple of different rides scheduled the week prior to our March 23rd Pedal Fun Day, which is planned for Russell Street Park. This event is a partnership between Brooksville Main Street, Tourism and Vice Chair Dolan. If anyone would like to get involved, they would love to have you. The Pedal Fun Day is a family friendly event. Lisa with Bike Florida will include a Century ride in the morning. In the afternoon there will be a variety of rides of varying lengths. They are planning for food trucks, a bike rodeo, a bike repair station and a bike decorating area. It is their hope to get the local bicycle companies involved sponsoring one of the stations. Crankworks does a monthly ride, she believes some of those rides happen on the GNT. Ms. Heon also mentioned that if the Board wanted to plan an event, there is grant money available to help with marketing. Board Member Kelly asked about any future events when the Coast to Coast is complete. Ms. Heon said they are planning a major celebration when this is completed. They are putting together a list of bicycle tour companies to send marketing information. She mentioned that a couple of bicycle tour companies have brought people into the Brooksville area to ride.

GNT Trail Update

Chairman Morris asked if the entire trail had been cleared after the Hurricanes. Operational Lead Williams updated the Board that the trail has been cleared to Richbarn, she mentioned that part of the trail is under water.

Citizens Input

An update on the request from John Ehlenbeck. Chairman Morris put in a request with Hernando County, as Chairman of the Committee, for a sign to be installed at Preston & Richbarn and Preston & Weatherly. Operational Lead Williams let the board know that if there are any concerns within the City of Brooksville, please follow up with her to address.

Adjourn - There being no further business, meeting was properly adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

Recording Secretary

GNTAC Chair

Russell Street Park Nature Area Management Plan Rough Draft October 2024 by Vincent Morris

Background

There were ideas of creating a nature area, village of historic buildings, a gazebo, a schoolhouse, a restroom, nature trail, and infrastructure for bicycles. There was also a tree and plant survey to see what plant species were initially present. The city was successful at creating the schoolhouse, the restroom, the gazebo, a bike stand, signage, and the paved looping bike trail (including a bridge).

History

The history of the site is related to its' position in the middle of historic Brooksville. The train station remains as well as some debris and remains of a railway. There are remains of old buildings suggesting that the location had residential or commercial buildings on the site.

The location, soils, and current vegetation suggests that the site was originally forested with hammock vegetation (upland hardwood forest) but few of the original species remain. Exotic species were planted in landscapes and additional invasive plants made their way onto the property.

Most historic buildings no longer persist with the exception of the train station. The area was left fallow for an extended period of time. There was an accidental logging done by the previous owners after the city purchased the property with unknown tree species removed. The site naturally reforested with early successional tree species mostly sweetgum, water oak, laurel oak, camphor, loblolly pine. There remain some large live oaks, loblolly pines and camphors . There is an incised creek that flows through the property that has probably been altered due to the railroad infrastructure. There are some small seasonal streams

The City added a looping paved trail that connects with the Good Neighbor Trail (Coast to Coast bike trail). A retention pond was added on the south part which is fenced.

Goal

The goal is to manage a portion of Russell Street Park for aesthetics and preservation of nature. This portion would be defined as the area surrounded by the looping bike trail and southwest of the loop to the railroad tracks, and east to the stream and retention pond. To carry out this objective the city could manage natural vegetation and control invasive vegetation. This type of management could provide a low cost solution to maintenance while also serving additional benefits. It could provide habitat to species (plants and animals) that are part of the Annutteliga Hammock. It could be a nature viewing and educational area where visitors can see a natural hammock and the special plants and animals associated with this plant community. It could be used for a nature trail (not part of this plan).

This area could contribute to the conservation of local species (genetics) that are being lost due to development, and the spread of invasive species.

Desired Condition

The desired condition would be vegetation consistent with a Brooksville hammock defined as upland hardwood forest, free of invasive species. This is a forest of native trees, a midstory of shade tolerant trees and shrubs and shade loving groundcover.

Vegetation Management

To create the desired condition the invasive species would have to be controlled, desired plants that are already present would be allowed to persist, and additional native plant species would be added.

Invasive species to be controlled

Sward fern- This fern is present in two large patches. It threatens to cover most of the area and smother desirable plants. It is possible to eliminate this weed with hand pulling and treatment with herbicides. Two percent Glyphosate mixed with another treatment mode will control this species.

Coral Ardisia- This plant is present throughout. It also threatens to infest the entire area and smother desirable plants. This plant can be treated by hand pulling and treatment with herbicides. A ten percent solution of Triclopyr mixed with vegetable oil sprayed on the base of the plants is an effective treatment. If the berries are also treated, the associated seeds lose viability.

Camphor- This tree is present throughout in sizes from seedlings to large mature trees. This Tree can be girdled or treated with herbicides. A twenty percent Triclopyr herbicide mixed with vegetable oil applied basally will kill the tree. This tree could require cutting to safely remove larger specimens.

Brazilian pepper- This weed tree threatens to overtake the entire area. This tree should be treated as an EDRR plant. EDRR plants in this context are early detection rapid response plants. This tree is not prevalent in large numbers and should be controlled immediately upon detection. Getting rid of the initial colonizers will reduce overall control effort.

Air Potato. This invasive vine is widespread and occupies most of the natural area during the summer. A beetle, *Lilioceris cheni*, was already introduced that eats the foliage of the plant and has had some effect but air potato continues to overwhelm the park. A second *lilioceris* beetle may be added which consumes the potatoes. A one percent solution of triclopyr applied in the late summer can help eliminate infestations. Completely eliminating air potato in the park will be challenging because it is so widespread, so it may be advisable to treat portions of the nature area over time. Mowing seems to control air potato in appropriate areas.

Skunk vine- This vine is present throughout. It is difficult to treat because it is somewhat cryptic and the herbicides that kill it also kill surrounding desirable vegetation. A treatment plan could eventually be formulated. At this time it should just be removed by hand from desirable species at some interval or on a case by case basis.

Caesar's weed- This weed threatens many ecosystems by overtaking them. It also has a sticky seed that can cover a person's clothing. This weed should be treated as an EDRR because it is not present in high densities at this time.

Weedelia- This weed was introduced in the maintenance of one of the culverts. It is particularly difficult to control with herbicides. It should be treated as an EDRR with hand pulling.

Current Condition

There are many desirable plants present in the park. Live oaks have persisted which is one of the most important components of the upland hardwood forest type. Other valuable trees that are present to a lesser extent include southern redcedar, southern magnolia, winged elm, American elm, red mulberry, and sugarberry. Other tree species that are native but less desirable include sweetgum, laurel oak, water oak, and loblolly pine. These trees are short lived and are the type to invade a cleared area when it is left fallow. They invade and often grow large. Unfortunately they die at a young age and can present a falling hazard. They are beneficial for wildlife. There is a single white ash and Florida maple.

There are relics of human occupation including piles of bricks and cinder blocks, railroad ties, pipes, and uneven surfaces demonstrating the historic uses of this area.

There are many plants that are components of upland hardwood forests that probably lived here that appear to be absent.

Swamp Chestnut Oak- This tree is still present in other city and county properties as a legacy of the forest that used to be here. It is a large, long lived oak that probably dominated the local areas but was not preserved at Russell Street. It should be added and will serve with the live oaks as the primary overstory tree. It is ecologically significant, hosting many species of insect and birds.

Cooley's water willow- This low groundcover plant occurs in only about three counties in the world and has a federal endangered status. Russell Street Park probably hosted this plant at one time. This plant could be a groundcover species that might compete with some of the invasive species. It is a plant particularly identified with the Brooksville area with large botanical implications and local floristic identity.

Poison ivy- This plant is present in some areas of the park. This plant is mentioned because it could or should affect some of the activities obviously due to the allergic reaction it could cause to park users, volunteers, or staff. If other groundcover species are added to the park, they could compete with it and reduce the prevalence.

Live oak- This tree is already sufficiently present. It should remain as one of the premier overstory species.

Southern magnolia- This tree is present in the park and should remain as one of the important tree species. The current population may be sufficient. Because this tree is shade tolerant in the seedling stage of life, it is likely to become more abundant over time naturally.

Florida maple- One example of this tree somehow managed to remain in the park. It is usually a small tree present in good remaining hammocks in this area. More should be added.

Soap berry- This is usually a small tree (it can grow big) that was probably present in the past. It should be added as a significant botanical feature. This tree has a high potential as a commercially valuable species so central Florida strains should be preserved wherever possible.

Hornbeam and hophornbeam- These are small trees that occupy the space between the ground and the tall trees. They were probably present in the past and could be ecologically significant to wildlife. A few of each should be added if not already present.

Ferns and orchids- There are numerous species of ferns and orchids that are native to this type of hammock. Most are now absent due to the historical development. Educated staff or volunteers should add appropriate species as they become available and if conditions are appropriate.

Basket grass- This grass is present and could be considered an important groundcover species. There will probably be no need to plant this because it seems to naturally disperse when invasive plants are controlled. If basket grass is planted, the native species should be preferred.

Some native ferns particularly prefer to grow on rocks. These could be added to brick or cinder block piles to preserve the integrity of the archeological aspect of the park and they may thrive on this substrate.

There are other plants that could be added when additional research identifies them as Brooksville hammock species. The Florida Native Plant Society can be consulted about additional plants.

Management activities

The restoration of this park does not have to be an instant, expensive project. Invasives can be treated over time with the eventual goal to reduce their significance. Important species can be added as they become available or when larger invasives (such as camphor) are controlled. Volunteers and staff could work in this area as time allows and eventually the park could become a "perfect" example of Brooksville hammock. Scouts or school groups can participate in activities to restore the area. Care should be exercised due to the high density of poison ivy in certain areas.

A nature trail could be added so the public can view areas inaccessible from the paved trail.