



Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC)

April 2026 Council Meeting Minutes

PUBLIC MEETING: April 9th, 2026
TIME: 9:00 AM
LOCATION: St. Petersburg Distillery
855 28th Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33712

FGTC Members in Attendance:

Robin Birdsong – Florida Department of Transportation
Vincent “Chip” Birdsong – Florida Department of State
Stephanie Wardein – Governor-Appointed Private Landowner
Jim Couillard – Local Government, Marion County Parks & Recreation
Scott Stryker – Governor-appointed Greenway User
Dale Allen – Senate-Appointed Greenway User
Samantha Adams – Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
Shawn Thomas – United States Forest Service
Morgan Wilbanks – Governor-Appointed Greenway User
Chris Rietow -- FRCA
Brooks White – Florida Forest Service
PJ Marinelli – Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation
Mike Stephens – Governor-Appointed Trail User

Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) Staff in Attendance:

Samantha (Sam) Browne, Bureau Chief
Delaney Goins, Regional Coordinator, Staff to Council
Cassidy Haney, Regional Coordinator

Other FDEP Staff in Attendance:

Rachel Earlywine, Office of General Counsel

Members of the Public and Presenters in Attendance:

Jenee Priebe
Kyle Simpson
Mayor Mike Miller
Jason Lauritsen
Barbara Stalbird

Announcements:

Council Introductions

FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Call to Order – 9:01 AM

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION:

SECOND:

FGTC RECOMMENDATION: APPROVED

Trail Town Alliance Updates – 9:07 AM

Cassidy Haney, the North Region Coordinator for the Office of Greenways and Trails, discussed the implementation of the Trail Town Alliance Program. This program was conceived to give FDEP's Trail Towns a community of Trail Town representatives wherein they could seek support, ask questions, trade ideas and information with each other, and provide feedback and insight to OGT as the facilitators of the program and alliance. Haney emphasized that this program is being uplifted by the trail towns, and that their collaboration is what gives life to the idea. She then discussed TTA metrics and participation. Of the 22 towns designated prior to the December 2025 FGTC meeting, 12 were represented at the first TTA meeting with 17 out of 40 trail town champions invited in attendance. At the next TTA meeting in January, 15 out of 23 towns were represented, with 22 out of 50 invitees in attendance. At the TTA meeting, there were new ideas for promotional materials, which were swiftly translated into deliverables by OGT. Haney discussed the upcoming meeting, in which a representative from Malabar is slated to speak about their successes. Haney brought up the need for consistent branding across trail towns, as well as trail-to-town connectivity. She re-emphasized her continual commitment to learning from the trail towns and working to turn their feedback into action. The council commended Cassidy on the work she has put into the TTA program and recommended that she emphasize regional collaboration within the DEP trail town program, as well as with FTA Gateway Towns.

Legislation Updates – 9:46 AM

Samantha Browne of OGT reviewed recent legislative updates in the state of Florida regarding micro-mobility usage. Legislative changes include new and amended safety rules and definitions for micro-mobile forms of transportation, such as E-bikes, E-scooters, and golf carts. The legislation also initiated the creation of a task force within the Department of Highway Safety. Samantha went over the rules within the Florida State Park system and expressed that the enforcement of statewide laws is the responsibility of each municipality. She also discussed the re-ranking of the Regional Trail Priority System, which would have been required by the passage of a bill earlier in the session. Though the bill did not pass, the council wanted to review logistics for the eventual change to the system.

Benefits of a Public Art Program – 10:11 AM

The council heard a presentation from Jenee Priebe, who is a member of the Sunline Coalition alongside Tara Hubbard and John Barkett. She is also the founder of No Good Deeds Art. As a compliment to earlier presentations touching on different facets of the Pinellas Trail revitalization effort, she spoke on the ongoing movement towards making the trail into a thriving, interactive outdoor museum. She has worked with local multimedia artists to envision what the Pinellas Trail will look like as a linear gallery. Priebe emphasized the need for accessibility and the importance of community engagement. She predicts that this project will add to the character of St. Petersburg and bring tourist revenue in. Priebe seeks to integrate functionality into the thoughtfully chosen art pieces by carefully incorporating shade, seating areas, and other amenities that will not only cultivate an inviting environment but also provide people with a much-needed break from the less-favorable climate conditions that they might encounter. The goal of this endeavor is to spark conversation and create a space that locals and visitors alike wish to return to. The council was impressed by Priebe and the Sunline Coalition's ambitions. They invited her to communicate further and share her vision with others in the Trail Town Alliance.

Forward Pinellas' Advancements in Bike/Ped Count Data Collection & Analysis – 10:30 AM

Kyle Simpson of Forward Pinellas, which is a joint policy and planning agency serving Pinellas County, introduced the MPO/Planning Council's mission, which is to foster connection and community through growth. He discussed the history of MPOs under the Federal-Aid Highway Act, illustrating their importance across the state of Florida as tools to mobilize, coordinate, plan, and prioritize funding from state and federal sources. Simpson then elaborated on the bike/ped counting systems being implemented and tracked by Forward Pinellas. Prior to 2017, all bike/ped counts were carried out by volunteers. In 2017, eight permanent cameras were installed. Over the years, the MPO has progressively leaned into technological advancements and has taken findings from previous years to create a better, more advanced, and more manageable system for tracking bicycle and pedestrian usership across the Pinellas Trail. He discussed maintenance considerations, instances of vandalism and vehicle collisions, and routine interference during the data collection period, and explained how Forward Pinellas has accounted for these variables. Simpson presented the trail counter data while making sure to highlight the gaps. For March of 2024, the data points to most usership occurred via bicycle, with the highest frequency occurring in Dunedin and with visitation peaking around the weekend. Simpson received questions regarding usership after-hours and new positions, as well as praise for Forward Pinellas' work in the county.

Trail Towns: Sanibel Assessment – 10:46 AM

Mayor Mike Miller put Sanibel forth for consideration to be a Trail Town. He described Sanibel, including the layout, natural resources, and amenities. He chose to highlight Sanibel's bike-friendly trail system as one of its premiere features, with a wide, safe, and connective trail stretching the length of the town. Mayor Miller recounted how Sanibel has continued to rebuild and improve after Hurricane Ian destroyed much of the island's infrastructure, including the only causeway in and out of the island. He pointed to Sanibel's unique characteristics as a recreationally centered town, including the beautiful beaches, wildlife, museums, events, safety

programs, and businesses as strong reasons why Sanibel would be an asset to the Trail Town program. The council was highly impressed with the presentation and the cohesion among the community of Sanibel after Hurricane Ian. They moved to designate Sanibel as FDEP's 25th Trail Town.

Trail Coordination Committee Product Updates – 11:16 AM

The Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation's Jason Lauritsen presented the council with a recap of the Trail Coordination Committee's work and a summary of the products they developed. He discussed the deliverables, including a solutions lab and a trails toolkit, which was accessible via a QR code. First analysis examined buffer zones for hiking and paddling trails. Results found variability of access between demographic groups. The Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation seeks to understand and fill in the gaps to increase accessibility. This committee worked in conjunction with the University of Florida to identify areas of sensitivity. Lauritsen explained the data for trail access and highlighted that the data does not fully encompass the range of trail usership experiences. He relayed that Disney provided the foundation with a grant to improve trail accessibility. He also discussed how recently acquired conservation easements might improve access.

St. Pete Trails – 11:50 AM

Barbara Stalbird, who is the Assistant Director for the St. Petersburg Parks and Recreation Department, showcased some of St. Petersburg's local trails and parks to the council. Among the trails showcased were the Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, Clam Bayou Preserve, and the North Bay Trail. She noted that these preserves are nestled among a wide urban sprawl and offer vital resources and recreational opportunities for the citizens of St. Petersburg. She pointed out the many events that take place in the park system, which include night hikes and educational talks. Stalbird also talked about wildlife conflict in the parks and discussed the importance of education in conservation. The council and members of the public asked about broad connectivity in St. Petersburg, both from park-to-park and from the parks and trails to the community. She addressed these with potential city plans to lower or eliminate park costs as a step towards connecting the parks in the future.

Unpaved Trail Guidelines – 12:02 PM

Samantha Browne revisited the Unpaved Trail Guidelines document, which had gone through reformatting since the previous meeting in which it was presented. She confirmed that the language had been approved for the document and told the council that she would provide updates in the future.

Public Comment – 12:05 PM

Representatives from a local mountain bike club thanked the council and introduced their park to the committee and other members of the public.

MEETING ADJOURN – 12:22 PM

A motion was made and carried to adjourn the meeting.