



Florida Greenways and Trails Council (FGTC) December 2025 Council Meeting Minutes

PUBLIC MEETING: December 17th, 2025
TIME: 9:00 am
LOCATION: Florida Sheriff's Association Training Center
2617 Mahan Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32308

FGTC Members in Attendance:

Robin Birdsong – Florida Department of Transportation
Robert Steele – Water Management District, Northwest Florida
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
Rachel Penrod – Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
Tim Giesecke -- Division of Recreation & Parks-Florida Department of Environmental Protection
Dale Allen – Senate-Appointed Greenway User
Shawn Thomas – United States Forest Service
Morgan Wilbanks – Governor-Appointed Greenway User
Chris Rietow -- FRCA
Brooks White – Florida Forest Service
Ned Baier¹ – Volkert Inc., Florida Greenways and Trails Foundation

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

Samantha (Sam) Browne, Bureau Chief
Britney Mulholland, Assistant Chief
Delaney Goins, Regional Coordinator, Staff to Council
John Groves, Regional Coordinator
Cassidy Haney, Regional Coordinator
Zach Robinson, OGT Grants Coordinator

Other FDEP Staff in Attendance:

Sean Happel, Gubernatorial Fellow
Rachel Earlywine, Office of General Counsel

Members of the Public and Presenters in Attendance:

Jotan Borms, FDOT
Tanya Branton, FDOT
Lacey Boatright, FDOT
Amy Roberson, FDOT
Lakshmi Gurram, Charlotte County MPO
John Beamish, FDOT
Cheryl Stacks, St. Petersburg
Samantha Adams, FWC
Vernon Compton, Bluffline Trail Representative
T.S. Strickland, Bluffline Trail Representative

Announcements:

Council Introductions

FLORIDA GREENWAYS AND TRAILS COUNCIL BUSINESS:

Call to Order – 9:03 AM

Approve Agenda – 9:07 AM

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Jim Couillard

SECOND: Chris Rietow

FGTC RECOMMENDATION: APPROVED

Approve the October 2025 Meeting Summary – 9:08 AM

FGTC REMARKS:

MOTION: Jim Couillard

SECOND: Chris Rietow

FGTC RECOMMENDATION: APPROVED

Office of Greenways and Trails (OGT) Updates – 9:10 AM

Initial Office of Greenways & Trails Updates, led by Sam Browne, covered the statuses of multiple major regional trail corridors across the state of Florida. Ongoing efforts discussed include resolving land ownership and easement challenges; improving right-of-way data using GIS, county parcel data, and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) coordination; and working with the U.S. Forest Service on long-standing trail gaps- especially in national forest areas. Several trails were flagged for low momentum, with discussion about possibly removing some from official maps if land management or implementation remains unrealistic. A major discussion centered around the East Coast Greenway occurred- particularly about the

differences between state trail standards and those used by the private East Coast Greenway Alliance. Concerns were raised about inconsistent signage leading to user confusion along incomplete or segmented routes. In response, the council emphasized the need for better coordination between the state and the nonprofit to have more equal standards, consistent signage, and better communication to the public. Subsequent discussion moved on to the Trail Town Program and associated regional trail alliances. Multiple regions, often with the support and encouragement of the Office of Greenways and Trails, are organizing or strengthening trail alliances which serve to build momentum, garner funding, and collaborate with the larger trail town community. Additional updates were shared regarding prospective trail towns, as Key West has expressed interest in a trail town designation. Renaming and rebranding efforts were approved for several regional trails to reduce confusion and strengthen identity.

FDOT District Two (D2) Trail Inventory Update – 9:46 AM

Amy Roberson of FDOT D2 presented a major milestone to the council- a comprehensive trail inventory covering more than 300 miles of trails. Highlights include the use of GPS, video logs, and mobile data collection to document trail conditions; identification of safety issues- such as signage gaps, ADA compliance, and pavement conditions; and creation of a scoring system for trail safety, maintenance needs, and connectivity. This data will support funding decisions, improve emergency response and hurricane recovery, and feed into a statewide reporting requirement under Florida SB 106-2023. Several construction projects are underway in D2, including multiple segments of the Amelia Island trails with strong county funding support, as well as new and rehabilitated trail segments which have been funded through FDOT and local partners. Discussion also covered land acquisition funding challenges due to limitations of the Florida Forever program and use of alternative mechanisms such as Strategic Managed Areas to advance priority trail corridors.

Tallahassee Mountain Biking Association (TMBA) – 10:11 AM

Doug Bell of the Tallahassee Mountain Biking Association shared a few major updates, including progress on trail planning and maintenance. He discussed the feasibility of becoming an International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) designated Trail Town, which would open the door to new grant-funded projects for mountain bike trail improvements. Special emphasis was placed on generating and sustaining volunteer engagement, professional trail design for sustainable trail systems, and integrating recreation with established conservation goals.

FDOT Non-Motorized Traffic Monitoring Program – 10:31 AM

Jotan Borms of FDOT discussed how data collection is a crucial aspect of large-scale projects. He reviewed the FDOT four-pillar program, which includes statewide continuous count programs, short-term count programs, outreach programs, and repository programs. He highlighted the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway as a case study for how data collection can impact usership and sustainability practices. Furthermore, he explained that continual maintenance is

a significant factor that is often overlooked in initial trail installation, and FDOT is adopting measures to account for all conditions that would hinder the upkeep of trails and trail systems.

BREAK – 10:52 AM

Paved Trail Best Practices Discussion – 11:08 AM

Sean Happel, the Gubernatorial Fellow for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), presented updates on the ongoing Paved Trail Best Practices Guide. He emphasized that the guide, now 36 pages, provides recommendations, but not mandates, for trail design, accessibility, safety, signage, lighting, crossings, trailheads, and amenities. New additions to the guide included considerations for wildlife habitat adjacent to conservation lands, differentiated trail widths in dense urban areas, standards for striping and retro-reflectivity, usage of raised speed tables, trail crossing treatments- i.e. the application of green paint and physical separators, outdoor fitness equipment at trailheads, greater communication standards for expanded accessibility, and a comparison of usable surface types. The council provided feedback, recommending adding clarification for the definition of a “hard surface” as per the guidance of Florida statutes and SUN Trail parameters. Additional counsel indicated the need for information on alternative surface material options. A discussion was had regarding the fire vulnerability of wooden structures, in which it was recommended to utilize nonflammable materials such as porous concrete and concrete decking when possible. The council expressed gratitude towards Mr. Happel for the depth and quality of the work and encouraged continued refinement of the guide.

TRAIL-GO Recap – 11:36 AM

Zach Robinson of FDEP OGT presented data and information on the fiscal year 2024-2025 Year 1 funded TRAIL-GO program. The \$4 million legislative appropriation granted local governmental entities the funds necessary for the maintenance and operation of established trails within the Florida Greenways and Trails System (FGTS). 36 grants were awarded to 22 communities statewide. About \$2 million remain, due to projects that were completed under budget, supply chain delays, and timing constraints on reimbursement. Grantees were able to use their funds to purchase new equipment, make repairs to trail surfaces, conduct bridge inspections, upgrade lighting devices, restore hurricane-damaged areas, manage vegetation, and improve safety measures. Since the program was only funded for one fiscal year, a motion was made to recommend continued funding in future legislative cycles. The motion was made by Ned Baier and seconded by Dale Allen. Subsequently, OGT staff will draft a support letter to leadership documenting demand for the program based on community need and demonstrated impact.

Sunshine Law Obligation Reminder – 11:50 AM

Rachel Earlywine provided the Council with an overview of their role as an advisory council in accordance with the Florida Greenways and Trails Act (F.S. 260.0142) as well as their

requirements under Florida's Government in the Sunshine Law (F.S. 286.011) and resources for additional guidance.

LUNCH – 11:55 AM

Trail Towns: St. Petersburg (Greater Arts District) Assessment – 1:30 PM

John Groves, the South Regional Coordinator for OGT, introduced Cheryl Stacks, the Transportation Manager for the City of St. Petersburg. Manager Stacks proposed that the City of St. Petersburg Greater Arts District (GAD) be designated as the 23rd Trail Town in Florida. GAD includes four sub-districts- the Warehouse Arts District, EDGE District, Central Arts District, and Waterfront Arts District. A unifying aspect of the GAD is the Pinellas Trail, which is a 60-mile multi-use trail that connects St. Petersburg to Tarpon Springs. The Pinellas Trail serves as a terminus for the Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail and the Florida Gulf Coast Trail. Within GAD, there is a strong integration of arts and culture, which has fostered a robust transportation system. Together, along with the support of the community, they have mobilized local businesses and spurred economic prosperity in the area. Many of the aforementioned businesses signed Trail Town pledges, which include restroom access, Wi-Fi, bicycle parking, and wayfinding resources. A motion to endorse and officially designate St. Petersburg GAD as a Trail Town was first moved by Robin Birdsong and seconded by Dale Allen. Cheryl Stacks, as a representative of her community, was given a Trail Town sign, Trail Town promotional materials, and was welcomed to the stage for a group photo. Further possible opportunities exist for a zero-mile marker at the Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail terminus.

Bluffline Trail Presentation – 1:48 PM

T.S. Strickland, in the stead of Vernon Compton, introduced and spoke about progress on the Bluffline Trail. The Bluffline Trail will be a 20-mile multimodal corridor connecting various landmarks along the Escambia waterfront. Bluffline would link two regional trails: the Great Northwest Coast Connector and the US 90 Trail Corridor. This trail would improve safety on high-risk corridors, provide greater workforce access to NAS Pensacola and Corry Station, revitalize communities along the trail via economic development and tourism. Further development of the trail would address the historic disconnection between these communities and the waterfront. So far, Bluffline 501(c)(3) has procured \$1.5 million in federal grant money for master planning, feasibility studies, and preliminary design. This money has helped create a phased approach plan for completing the trail. Additional grant applications are underway.

Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency Projects – 2:11 PM

Alexander Delgado of Blueprint IA discussed projects local to the Tallahassee region. He underscored the success of previous Blueprint projects in their ability to utilize limited resources to create community greenspaces- one of which was Capital Cascades Park. This park is a great example of how intuitive design can shape more cohesive living environments and provide key recreational linkages across an urban landscape. He went on to discuss Blueprint planning and implementation across Tallahassee parks and greenways and how this framework can lead to greater connectivity across preservation and conservation lands.

Council Questions & Public Comment – 2:28 PM

Due to timing constraints earlier in the day, the council members were unable to ask questions until after all Day 1 presentations had concluded. During this question period, comments were put forward regarding a future contingency for the “gap” property boundary in Marion County. It was confirmed that there are no other properties currently identified that would close the Cross Florida Greenway gap if the solar farm recreational easement isn’t successful. Other comments included a hope for more accountability metrics on the public information website of FDOT. The council then opened the floor for public comment. The only comment received was from Lakshmi Gurrum, the Director of the Charlotte County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). He expressed an interest in realigning part of the Florida Gulf Coast Trail through Port Charlotte. His interest was noted, and he was advised to follow up with the appropriate channels to resolve his request.

MEETING ADJOURN – 2:49 PM

Chris Rietow moved to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Ned Baier.