Focus Group Feedback
Phase 2

Thelma Boltin Trailhead &
Sweetwater Loop Trail Alignment Development

Date of Focus Group Meetings:
September 9, 2026
September 14, 2026
September 16, 2026
September 23, 2026
October 20, 2026

City of
Gainesville
Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs

Focus Group Meeting Presentation

Project Introduction

The City Commission moved to reimagine the former site of the Thelma Boltin Center as a City Park and Trailhead for the Sweetwater Trail Loop system.

The project includes conceptual design for **two main components:**

1. **Thelma Boltin Site: Park & Trailhead**
2. **Sweetwater Greenway Trailhead Alignment**

The trailhead is funded jointly through WSPP (Wild Spaces & Public Places), tree mitigation funds, and stormwater management utility funds.

The conceptual plans for the trail alignment will include a budget projection so that funding can be identified for that portion of the project. Trail construction is not currently funded; however, this project will help establish a construction budget for the City for future planning.





PRESENTATION SLIDES FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Focus Group Meeting Presentation

Project Scope

Thelma Boltin Site/ Trailhead:

- Approximately 2.2 acre site divided by NE 2nd Ave with Sweetwater Branch Creek running through the site.
- Conduct site survey and ecological analysis.
- Create a Sweetwater Greenway Trailhead and community park that honors Thelma Boltin's contributions, folk art legacy, and the site's World War II history.
- Provide usable outdoor community space and maintain community gardens.

Sweetwater Greenway Trail:

- Study potential trail corridors using public rights-of-way and existing easements with consideration to the creek, stormwater, parking, and accessibility.
- Incorporate of a multi-use trail that follows NE Boulevard from University to 6th Street Rail Trail.







PRESENTATION SLIDES FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Focus Group Meeting Presentation

Process

The public engagement for this project will occur in three phases, each building on community input gathered during the previous phase. All three phases include focus group meetings, City advisory board and committee meetings, and 1 community workshop. The second and third phase include one City Commission Meeting.

This project is currently in the second phase, Share Draft Designs + Verify Understanding, which includes focus group meetings, the second public workshop, and a preliminary City Commission presentation.

Ways to stay involved in this project include attending public workshops, sharing information with the community, and staying in touch with City of Gainesville Wild Spaces & Public Places.



Menti-Poll Word Cloud & "Spirit of the Park" Feedback Board from Workshop #1

PRESENTATION SLIDES FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Focus Group Meetings

Overview

Focus group meetings were held with the following Advisory Boards and Groups:

Advisory Board/Group	Date	Location
Tree Advisory Board (TAB)	September 9, 2026	Thomas Center
Duckpond Neighborhood Association (DNA)	September 14, 2026	Zoom (Online)
Public Recreation & Parks Board	September 16, 2026	Thomas Center
The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center	September 23, 2026	Thomas Center
Community Garden	September 28, 2026	Zoom (Online)
Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board	October 20, 2026	RTS Administration Building



IMAGE OF THE SPANISH COURT AT THE THOMAS CENTER IN GAINESVILLE, FL

Tree Advisory Board

Focus Group Meeting

A focus group meeting was held with the **Tree Advisory Board** on September 9, 2026, at the Thomas Center.

The Gainesville **Tree Advisory Board** is a 5-member committee appointed by the City Commission and established to protect Gainesville's urban forest.

Format

- Presentation by Project Team
- Discussion with Board Members
- Members of the Project Team and Rachel Mandell (WSPP) attended



PHOTO OF THE TREE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
(9/9/26)

Tree Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 1 of 3

At the conclusion of the presentation, members of the Tree Advisory Board provided feedback to the project team:

Creek & Maintenance

- The creek wall will be replaced and naturalized edges will be created where feasible.
- Full historic restoration is not feasible due to site constraints.
- Concerns were raised about creek and landscape maintenance.

Utilities

- Concerns were raised about aging utilities and utilities crossing above creek.
- Concern was raised that utility upgrades could snowball into additional improvements.



PHOTO OF THE TREE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING (9/9/26)

Tree Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 2 of 3

Parking & Access

- On-street parking could be incorporated into Concept 1.
- Much discussion was centered around trailhead parking needs.
- Most survey respondents walk or bike to the site.
- On-street parking could complicate circulation.

Project Process

- Funding decisions will ultimately be made by the commission.
- Emphasis was placed on keeping the public informed and avoiding any surprises.

Operations

- The site design and proposed changes need to consider long-term maintenance.



PHOTO OF THE TREE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
(9/9/26)

Tree Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 3 of 3

Board Member Suggestions

- Continue conversations with gardeners for the community garden.
- The use of tree mitigation funds should support tree preservation.
- Recommend clarifying that tree mitigation is required for certain removals.
- Tree mitigation funds can be used to protect trees in the future.
- Determine how important on-site parking is to users.
- Recommend that tree removals come back to this board.
- The age of infrastructure should be included in public-facing materials.
- Keep public informed in advance of tree removals.
- Incorporate public art to help tell the site's story.



PHOTO OF THE TREE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
(9/9/26)

Duckpond Neighborhood Association

Focus Group Meeting

A focus group meeting was held with **Duckpond Neighborhood Association (DNA)** on September 14, 2026, on Zoom (Online).

Format

- Presentation by Project Team
- Discussion with Board Members
- Members of the Project Team and Rachel Mandell and Cristina Cortez (WSPP) attended





HEADER AND MAP FROM DUCKPOND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION WEBSITE: HTTPS://DUCKPONDNEIGHBORHOOD.WORDPRESS.COM

Duckpond Neighborhood Association

Meeting Notes – 1 of 3

At the conclusion of the presentation, members of the Duckpond Neighborhood Association provided feedback to the project team:

Historic Preservation

- Strong desire to honor:
  - Thelma Boltin's legacy and folk art
  - WWII soldiers
  - Former site features (BBQ pit, shuffleboard courts)
  - Rock and Roll history
- Thoughts on achieving this included:
  - Creating an outline of the original building
  - Placement of a stage in the original auditorium location
  - Returning the historic marker and building sign to their original locations on the site

Community Gathering

- Restore the site as a gathering place and community destination.
- A screened pavilion is desired, potentially with activities such as ping-pong.





HEADER AND MAP FROM DUCKPOND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION WEBSITE: HTTPS://DUCKPONDNEIGHBORHOOD.WORDPRESS.COM

Duckpond Neighborhood Association

Meeting Notes – 2 of 3

Trail Design & Character

- The Sweetwater Greenway and its connection to the trailhead received strong support.
- Shared-use trail on the west side of NE Boulevard received strong support.
- Concerns were raised about providing adequate separation between road and trail.
- Potential railing and boardwalk treatments were discussed around Duckpond area.
- Tree preservation was emphasized as an important consideration.

Parking, Access & Transportation

- Discussion included how much parking the future park needs.
- Opinions differed about removing on-street parking.
- Drop-off and accessibility for the community gardens are needed.
- Discussion also addressed the proposed removal of vehicular traffic from NE 2nd Ave.





HEADER AND MAP FROM DUCKPOND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION WEBSITE: HTTPS://DUCKPONDNEIGHBORHOOD.WORDPRESS.COM

Duckpond Neighborhood Association

Meeting Notes – 3 of 3

Design Features & Amenities

- Concept A was generally preferred.
- Ideas included shuffleboard, Art Deco BBQ, and interpretive kiosks.

Safety & Concerns

- Additional crossing safety measures were suggested at NE 8th Ave, including a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) accessible to bicyclists.
- Concerns were raised about the use of public gathering spaces by unhoused people.

Outreach & Engagement

- Participants were reminded that the project website contains important project information and materials.
- The community was identified as potential contributors to developing historical information as the site's design process.





HEADER AND MAP FROM DUCKPOND NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION WEBSITE: HTTPS://DUCKPONDNEIGHBORHOOD.WORDPRESS.COM

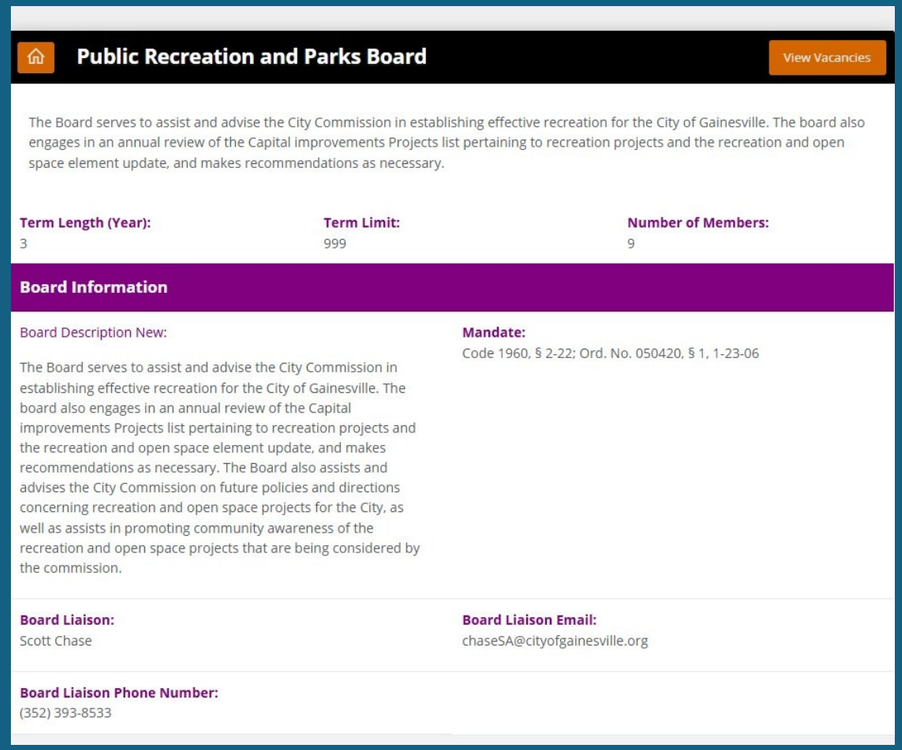
Public Recreation & Parks Board

Focus Group Meeting

A focus group meeting was held with the **Public Recreation & Parks Board** on September 16, 2026 at The Thomas Center.

Format

- Presentation by Project Team
- Discussion with Board Members
- Members of the Project Team and Rachel Mandell (WSPP) attended



Public Recreation and Parks Board — View Vacancies

The Board serves to assist and advise the City Commission in establishing effective recreation for the City of Gainesville. The board also engages in an annual review of the Capital improvements Projects list pertaining to recreation projects and the recreation and open space element update, and makes recommendations as necessary.

Term Length (Year): 3

Term Limit: 999

Number of Members: 9

Board Information

Board Description New:

The Board serves to assist and advise the City Commission in establishing effective recreation for the City of Gainesville. The board also engages in an annual review of the Capital improvements Projects list pertaining to recreation projects and the recreation and open space element update, and makes recommendations as necessary. The Board also assists and advises the City Commission on future policies and directions concerning recreation and open space projects for the City, as well as assists in promoting community awareness of the recreation and open space projects that are being considered by the commission.

Mandate: Code 1960, § 2-22; Ord. No. 050420, § 1, 1-23-06

Board Liaison: Scott Chase

Board Liaison Email: chaseSA@cityofgainesville.org

Board Liaison Phone Number: (352) 393-8533

ADVISORY BOARD DESCRIPTION – CITY OF GAINESVILLE, FL WEBSITE

Public Recreation & Parks Board

Meeting Notes – 1 of 3

At the conclusion of the presentation, members of the Public Recreation & Parks Board provided feedback to the project team:

Project Scope, Funding & Timeline

- Clarification on the budgeted $2M being for park improvements and the trail currently being conceptual and unfunded.
- Park and trail planning are happening together so the trail alignment can be coordinated with site design.
- Additional floodplain improvements would be city-funded, not funded through WSPP.
- The project is expected to go to the Commission in early to mid 2027, with park construction being a couple of years out.

Park Amenities

- The two concepts are not exclusive.
- Preferred elements from each can be combined into the next round of concepts.

Public Recreation & Parks Board

Meeting Notes – 2 of 3

Park Amenities - Continued

- Positive feedback towards:
  - Walkway adjacent to the creek to create a “water walk” experience
  - Chess tables
  - Native, low maintenance landscaping
  - Pervious pavement for parking – with concern to maintenance and load bearing
  - Dog watering station

Trees, Property & Creek

- Questions focused on which trees would be removed, particularly along the creek and north side of the site.
- Tree decisions would involve the City arborist, NV5 arborist, and Tree Advisory Board.
- There was some confusion regarding the northern property boundary and adjacent privately owned property.
- Additional floodplain storage is intended to address an existing flooding issue and improve upstream and downstream conditions.

Public Recreation & Parks Board

Meeting Notes – 3 of 3

Transportation & Parking

- Significant discussion was centered on one-way vs two-way circulation, roadway width, and maintaining existing curb line.
- Working within existing curb line would help reduce costs.
- Concerns were raised about on-street parking at pinch points.
- Members expressed interest in:
  - A crosswalk across 8th Avenue
  - Road narrowing as a traffic calming measure
  - Potential railing for bicycle safety
- The proposed FDOT crossing is currently planned as a rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB), not a raised crossing, with the project scheduled for 2028.

Engagement

- Bring a transportation-focused board to the workshop.
- A transportation engineer will attend the upcoming community workshop to help address transportation questions and concerns.
- Consider bringing a map of the Duckpond area to the workshop.

The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center

Focus Group Meeting

A focus group meeting was held with **The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center** on September 23, 2026 at The Thomas Center.

Format

- Presentation by Project Team
- Discussion with Board Members
- Members of the Project Team and Rachel Mandell and Cristina Cortez (WSPP) attended

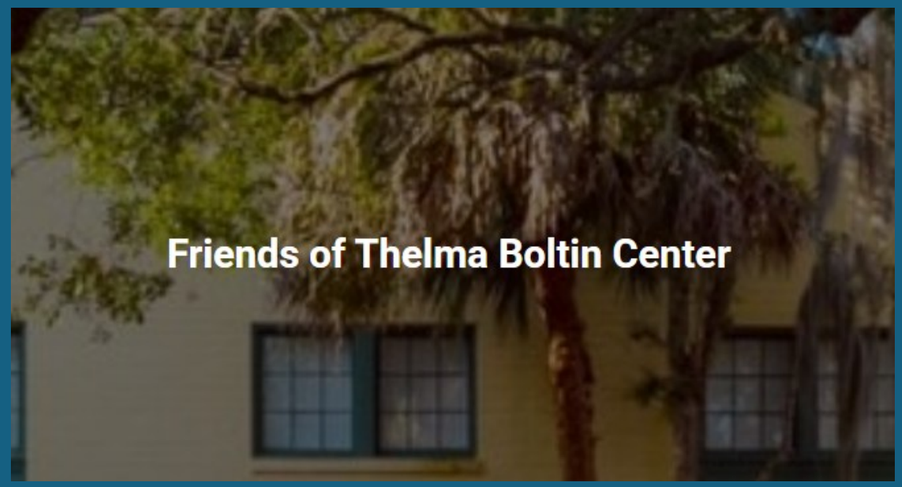


IMAGE FROM FRIENDS OF THELMA BOLTIN WEBSITE

The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center

Meeting Notes – 1 of 3

At the conclusion of the presentation, members of The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center provided feedback to the project team:

Historic Preservation

- Strong emphasis was placed on honoring the music history of the site.
- An outdoor kiosk that plays interactive videos or a history loop was suggested.
- Interest in:
    - Preservation and reusing the original Thelma Boltin sign
    - Placing a Tom Petty statue on site
    - Outlining the historic building

Community Gathering

- Community garden is important to some attendees.
- A covered pavilion for community events is preferred.

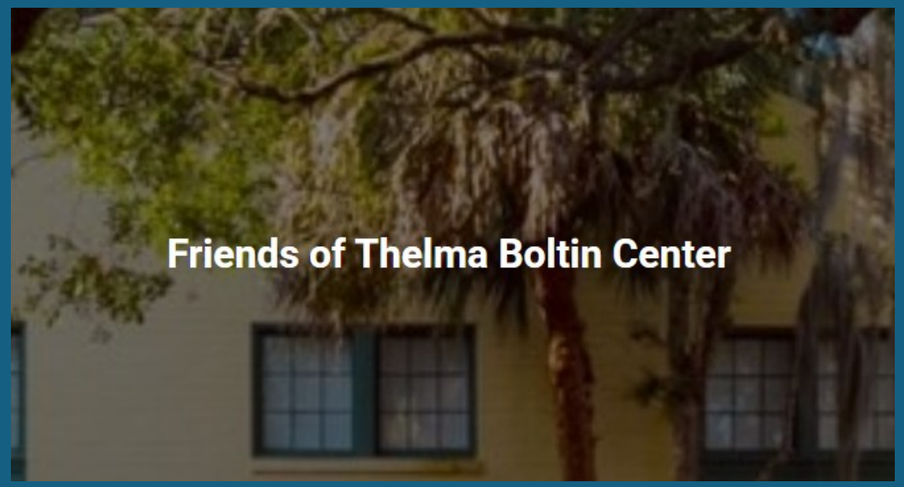


IMAGE FROM FRIENDS OF THELMA BOLTIN WEBSITE

The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center

Meeting Notes – 2 of 3

Parking & Transportation

- Mixed views on parking were received:
  - Members preferred the parking in Concept B for possible events.
  - Members preferred on-site parking spaces over on-street parking spaces.
- Discussion on traffic patterns:
  - 2nd Avenue will remain, but vehicular access will be removed.

Trail Design & Character

- Avoid overdoing the trail with wide sidewalk widths and excessive signage.
- Several attendees do not want a shared use path through the Duckpond.

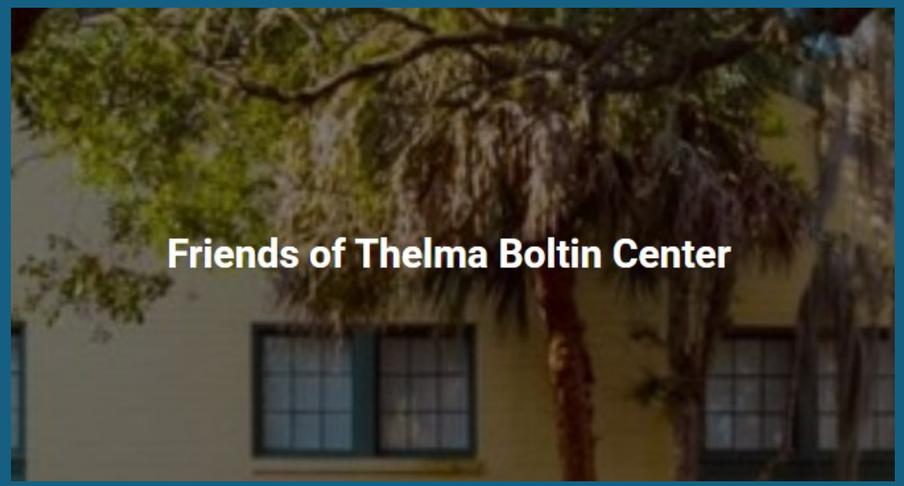


IMAGE FROM FRIENDS OF THELMA BOLTIN WEBSITE

The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center

Meeting Notes – 3 of 3

Engagement

- The next meeting with The Friends of the Thelma Boltin Center should be on the project site.
- QR codes are not preferred for any future meetings, and paper copies are appreciated.
- Participants asked if a revised version of the two concept plans ("Concept C") could be presented at the upcoming Workshop. The Project Team will gather additional feedback from general public at Workshop #2, and then work on revisions based on all the feedback provided in Phase 2 of the engagement process.

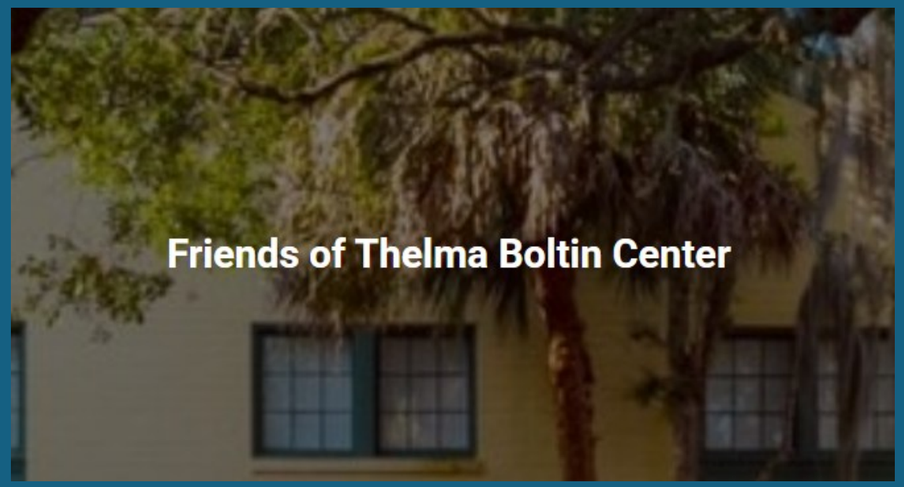


IMAGE FROM FRIENDS OF THELMA BOLTIN WEBSITE

Community Garden

Focus Group Meeting

Members of the **Community Garden** reviewed the project materials and provided feedback via email.

Preferences/Needs:

- Concept A's layout is preferred primarily due to garden's proximity to waste receptacles.
- Water availability around garden beds via fixed waterspouts is needed.
- Dedicated safe location for hose is needed.
- Maintain or slightly increase number of garden beds is ideal.
- Provide space for gardeners to grow fruit trees.



COMMUNITY GARDENS AT THE THELMA BOLTIN PROJECT SITE



IMAGE FROM CITY OF GAINESVILLE WEBSITE

Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Focus Group Meeting

A focus group meeting was held with the **Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board** on October 20, 2026 at The RTS Administration Building.

Format

- Presentation by Project Team
- Discussion with Board Members
- Members of the Project Team and Cristina Cortez (WSPP) attended

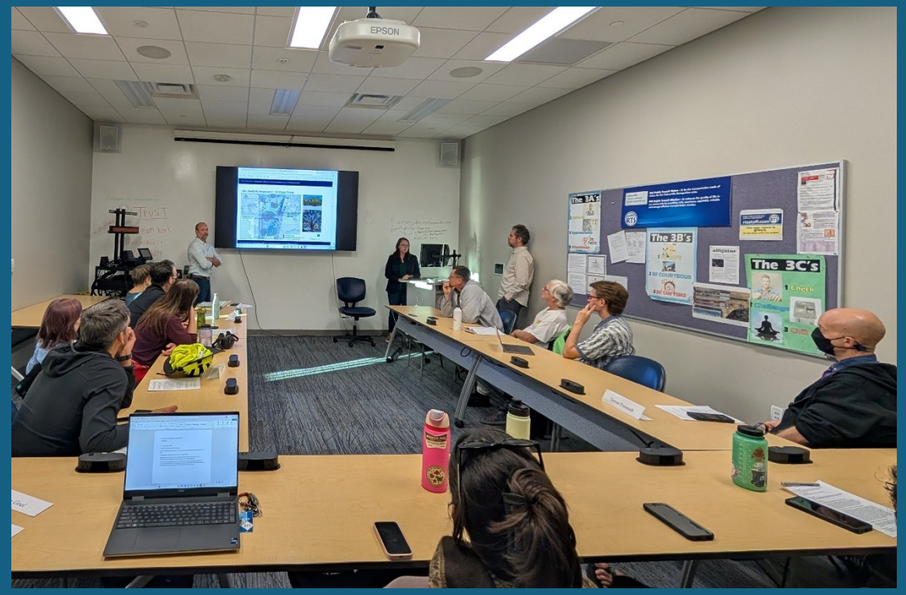


PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

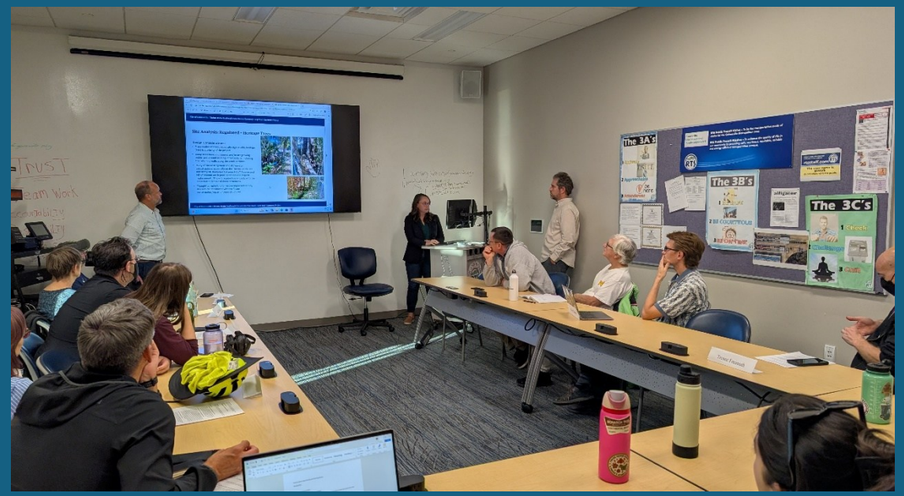


PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 1 of 5

At the conclusion of the presentation, members of the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board provided feedback to the project team:

Parking & Right-of-Way

- Minimizing or eliminating on-site and on-street parking was strongly preferred.
- Existing parking near the site was described as being underutilized with other alternatives nearby.
- Some noted that residential driveways reduce the need for on-street parking, while others commented that residents' guests still need parking.
- Concern was raised that preserving on-street parking now is short-sighted when it will be underutilized even more in the future.



PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

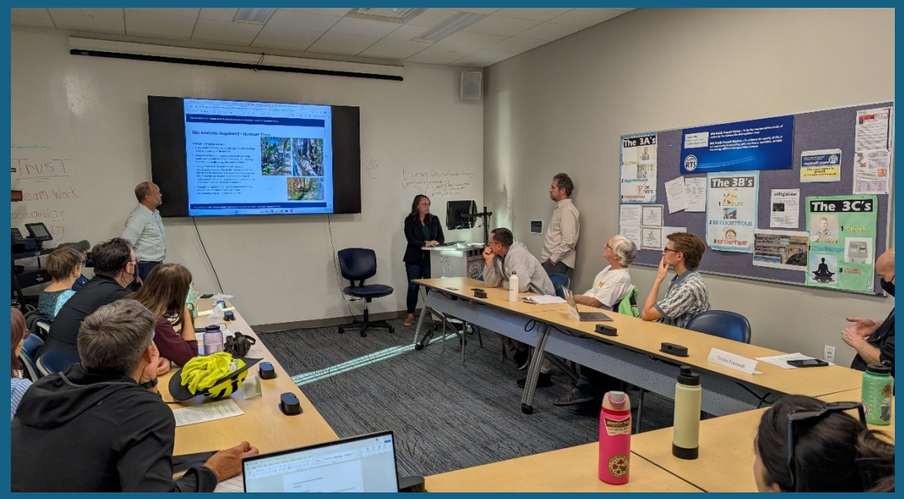


PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 2 of 5

Street Configuration & Traffic

- One-way streets were generally supported.
- The streets currently operate at relatively low speeds. Speed was viewed as more important than roadway width in determining comfort and safety.
- An alternative park concept was discussed which included one-way traffic, no on-street parking, a separate shared-use path, and a separate interior park walk adjacent to the separate shared-use path.

Shared-Use Path Safety & Design

- Physical separation from vehicle travel lanes was identified as high priority.
- A wider shared-use path is desirable. 12’ was discussed as desirable while some commented that 14’ is ideal. The project team noted that the creek may limit this in some locations.
- Moving the curb was recognized as more expensive but potentially capable of creating a more desirable trail condition.



PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

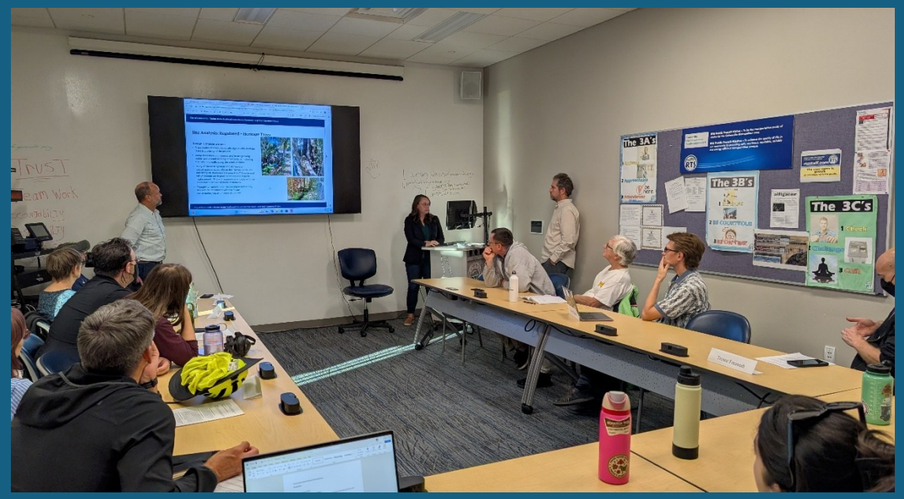


PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 3 of 5

Trail Connections & Crossings

- Questions were raised about connections to transit and the Hawthorne Trail.
- Concern was raised about the trail changing sides (South to North) along 10th Avenue near Main Street. The project team indicated that a crossing would likely occur before (east of) Main Street.
- One member noted that the trail should be on west side of NE Blvd so that it aligns with the western crossing (FDOT project) at University.
- When connecting to the rail trail on NE 10th Ave, near Cypress and Grove, preference for Option 3 was expressed: remove parking and maximize/enhance the shared-use path.

Stormwater, Creek & Flooding

- Nearby streets flood after large storms.
- One member noted that water emerges from the ground near the Publix.
- Project team confirmed that retaining walls would be required around portions of the creek on site. The area has been studied and Example A provides enough space to accommodate a sloped bank on one side.



PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

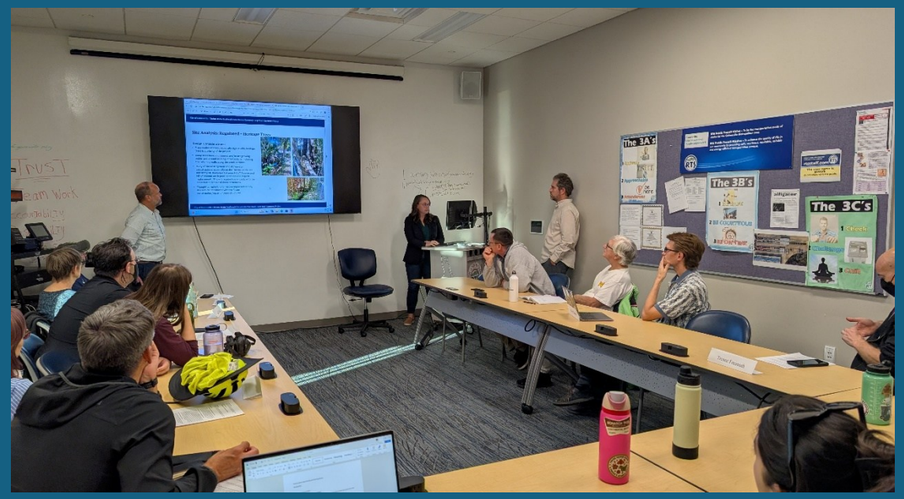


PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 4 of 5

Utilities & Constructability

- The project team generally prefers to avoid underground utility work when possible due to cost considerations.
- Utilities crossing the creek will require coordination with GRU.
- It is too early in the design process to determine construction-related access impacts, durations, or costs.

Park Character & Use

- Comments were made about the existing on-site parking lots rarely being used.
- One member commented that people likely will not drive to go to this park and added that there is other parking in the area.
- Wayfinding signage is desired as well as a bike repair station (nearest one being located at Depot Park).



PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

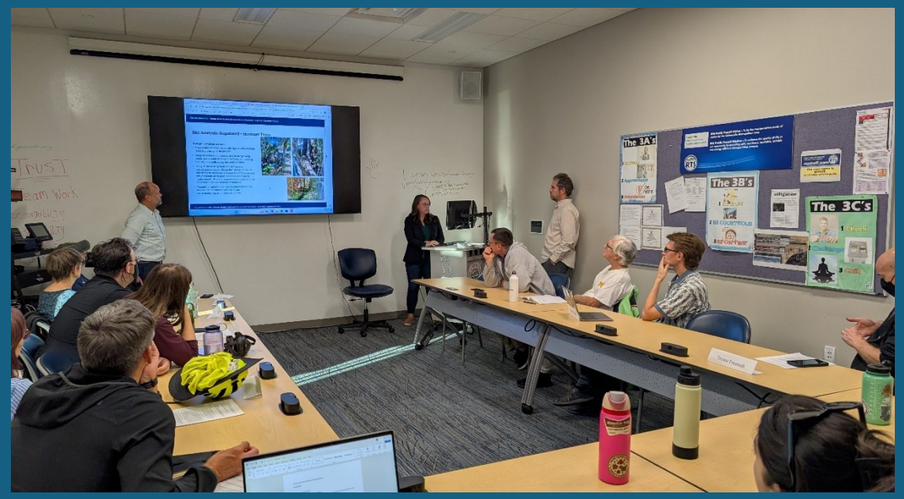


PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Board

Meeting Notes – 5 of 5

Concept A/B

- Commenters generally favored Concept A for:
  - More access points (particularly in case of an emergency)
  - A more family-friendly orientation
  - More opportunities for interior loops
  - Less of a “pass-through” feel
  - Greater separation between the separate shared use-path and interior park walks
- Concern was raised that Concept B could create conflicts where the bike path merges with other park circulation.
- Curving paths around existing trees were viewed as aesthetically pleasing but potentially an obstacle for bicyclists moving at a faster pace.
- Project team clarified that this path is intended for users of all ages and multiple forms of transportation.



PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

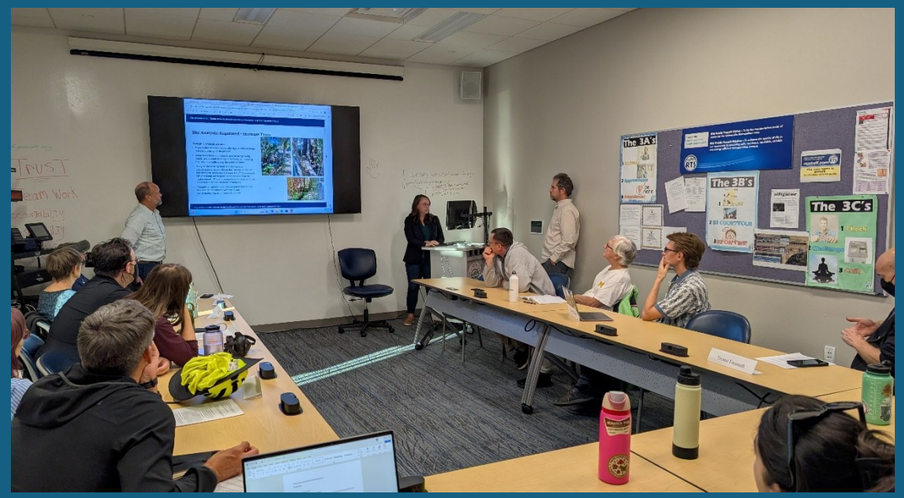


PHOTO OF THE BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD (10/20/26)

Historic Preservation Board

Focus Group Meeting

Feedback from the **Historic Preservation Board** will be added to the project website following its November 3, 2026 meeting.