



## MEMORANDUM

TO: City Commission – City of North Port  
FROM: Board of Directors of The Environmental Conservancy of North Port (the “EC”)  
DATE: June 18, 2020  
RE: Conservation Area Proposal in the Active Scrub-Jay Area of North Port

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This Memorandum is submitted to summarize the Environmental Conservancy of North Port’s “Conservation Area” Proposal for the Active Scrub-Jay Area of North Port (the “Active Area”).

- The Active Area is one of two areas nominated to the Sarasota County Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (the “ESLPP”) by Edie Driest and Debbie Blanco; this Active Area is the nomination the City did NOT issue a letter of support for.
- Pursuant to Agenda Item 19-1418 the City owns 19 “City Owned Lots for Landbank” and 184 “City Owned Lots for Future Use” - 3 of which are in the Active Area.
  - Per this agenda item, future uses include “future parks, drainage access, infrastructure needs and lots to use for swapping for archeological sites, affordable housing and properties the City is trying to acquire”.
  - The EC suggests that “environmental conservation” be added as a “future use” description for City owned lots.
- The EC is working to purchase lots itself in the Active Area, having successfully raised \$10,000.00 in the last two months for the acquisition of two Sarasota County surplus lots via auction bidding. Those purchases are projected to be complete by July of 2020.
- With these purchases, the EC will embark upon the creation of a Conservation Area of scrub/scrubby flatwoods habitat in the Active Area, and is inviting the City of North Port to join us in our efforts by:
  - Converting the City’s 3 lots in the Active Area to “environmental conservation” lots in perpetuity.

- Engaging in land swaps with all willing developers that own lots in the Active Area using the City’s 184 Future Use lots and/or the 19 Landbank lots and converting those swapped lots to “environmental conservation” use lots in perpetuity.
  - If the City would desire, the land-swap arrangement could be expanded to include the non-developer lot owners in the Active Area as well.
- The EC is able to provide land management assistance for the land-swapped lots in the Conservation Area if the City would so desire.
- The EC is willing to cover transfer of title costs for the land-swaps in the Active Area (title searches, deed preparations, minimum documentary stamp tax and recording fees).
- In support of the Conservation Area, the EC will continue to fundraise with the goal of purchasing privately-owned non-nominated lots in the Active Area to be held as conservation land, and will expand its efforts to purchase nominated lots if the ESLPP nomination is not successful.
- Because Costs of Community Service Studies generally show that residential land is a net drain on local governments with a ratio above 1.0. The ratios for the other two land use categories studied (commercial/industrial and farmland/open space) are usually well below 1.0, representing net gains for local governments. COCS studies offer overwhelming evidence that, in most cases, conservation saves local governments money. Read more on this topic at: <https://conservationtools.org/guides/15-cost-of-community-services-studies>.
- Studies have shown that the market values of residential properties located near parks and natural areas are typically higher than those of comparable properties elsewhere. Property owners benefit from higher property values and local governments benefit from an increased tax base. One study of parks and open space in two of Florida’s counties demonstrated tangible evidence of this open space premium. In the densely settled portions of Leon and Alachua Counties, homes within 100 feet of parks and open space realized an increase in home value—an average of approximately \$14,400 in Leon County and \$8,200 in Alachua County. Meanwhile, a study in Orange County by the University of Central Florida found that the average home within 100 feet of a natural park was worth 18.3 percent more than similar homes farther away. Read more on this topic at:
  - [https://www.1000friendsofflorida.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FL-Economic-Benefits-fact-sheet\\_highres.pdf](https://www.1000friendsofflorida.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FL-Economic-Benefits-fact-sheet_highres.pdf)
  - <https://www.gainesville.com/article/LK/20150809/News/604159300/GS>
  - <https://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/articles/economic-value-open-space>
- Across the state, land acquisition, restoration and management programs continue to seek to protect the Scrub-jay and its habitat. By joining the EC in this effort and participating in the Conservation Area with City-owned lots, the City would be adding to its environmental conservation successes and would be playing an integral part in protecting this special bird and it’s dwindling habitat.