



North Port

FLORIDA



Consideration of Eminent Domain for 30 Parcels Located Within the Natural Corridor of Spring Haven Drive Area

Stefan Kalev

North Port Natural Resources Division

City Commission Regular Meeting

June 9, 2026

Background – Early Project Development

Date	Key Action
September 25, 2014	Spring Haven Drive Extension approved in Fiscal Year 2014-2015 budget.
February 12, 2015	Memo provided outlining project details and prior analysis.
May 24, 2016	Agreement No. 2016-02 executed with Charlotte Engineering & Surveying for design and permitting.
August 25, 2016	First public meeting held at Morgan Family Community Center.
October 25, 2016	Supplemental Agreement #1 approved to modify Environmental Resource Permit (ERP) and complete hydraulic analysis.



Background – Shift Toward Acquisition

Date	Key Action
May 4, 2017	Friends of Little Salt Spring presented concerns about wildlife impacts to the area.
March 6, 2018	Commission considered terminating roadway project and reallocating funds to land acquisition.
April 24, 2018	Commission directed City Manager to stop all clearing in the Myakkahatchee Creek greenway.
May 3, 2018	Commission terminated roadway project; directed City Manager to pursue acquisition options.
July 24, 2018	Commission approved \$1.5M Surtax funding for parcel acquisition.



Background – Acquisition Efforts

Date	Key Action
June 17, 2019	Commission discussed land acquisition and impacts of roadway cancellation.
September 12, 2019	City purchased five parcels from Q Smith Homes, LLC for \$55,000.
April 14, 2020	City nominated 30 privately owned parcels to Sarasota County’s Environmental Sensitive Lands Protection Program.
April 23, 2024	Commission discussed corridor, funding, and environmental issues; withdrew \$5.945M Resilient SRQ request; directed future agenda return.
April 1, 2026	Sarasota County updated City staff that ESLP funds cannot be used due to owner’s price exceeding appraised value.



What Is the North Port Natural Corridor area?

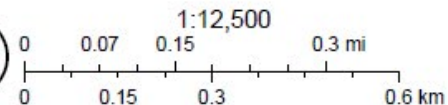
- A continuous ecological and cultural greenway
- Extending from Little Salt Spring to Myakkahatchee Creek (Big Slough)
- The corridor supports wildlife movement, protects archaeological resources, and preserves one of North Port's most significant natural landscapes.

Myakkahatchee Creek/Little Salt Spring Greenway Corridor



4/3/2026

North Port Streets — Local Roads
Major Roads



State of Florida, Vantor



Why This Corridor Matters?

- Habitat for diverse wildlife species
- Provides natural floodplain function and water quality benefits
- Supports community identity and environmental stewardship
- Prevents fragmentation of sensitive habitat
- Identified as a significant wildlife corridor based on documented citizen research



Overview of Spring Haven Site


- 9.3 acres consisting of 30 vacant lots
- Located along the west side of Myakkahatchee Creek
- Adjacent to Butler Park, Morgan Family Community Center, Heron Creek Middle School, and North Port High School
- Surrounded by existing residential neighborhoods to the south and west


Spring Haven Property Ownership

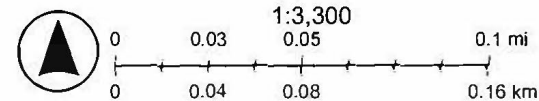


4/2/2026

 Area Parcels

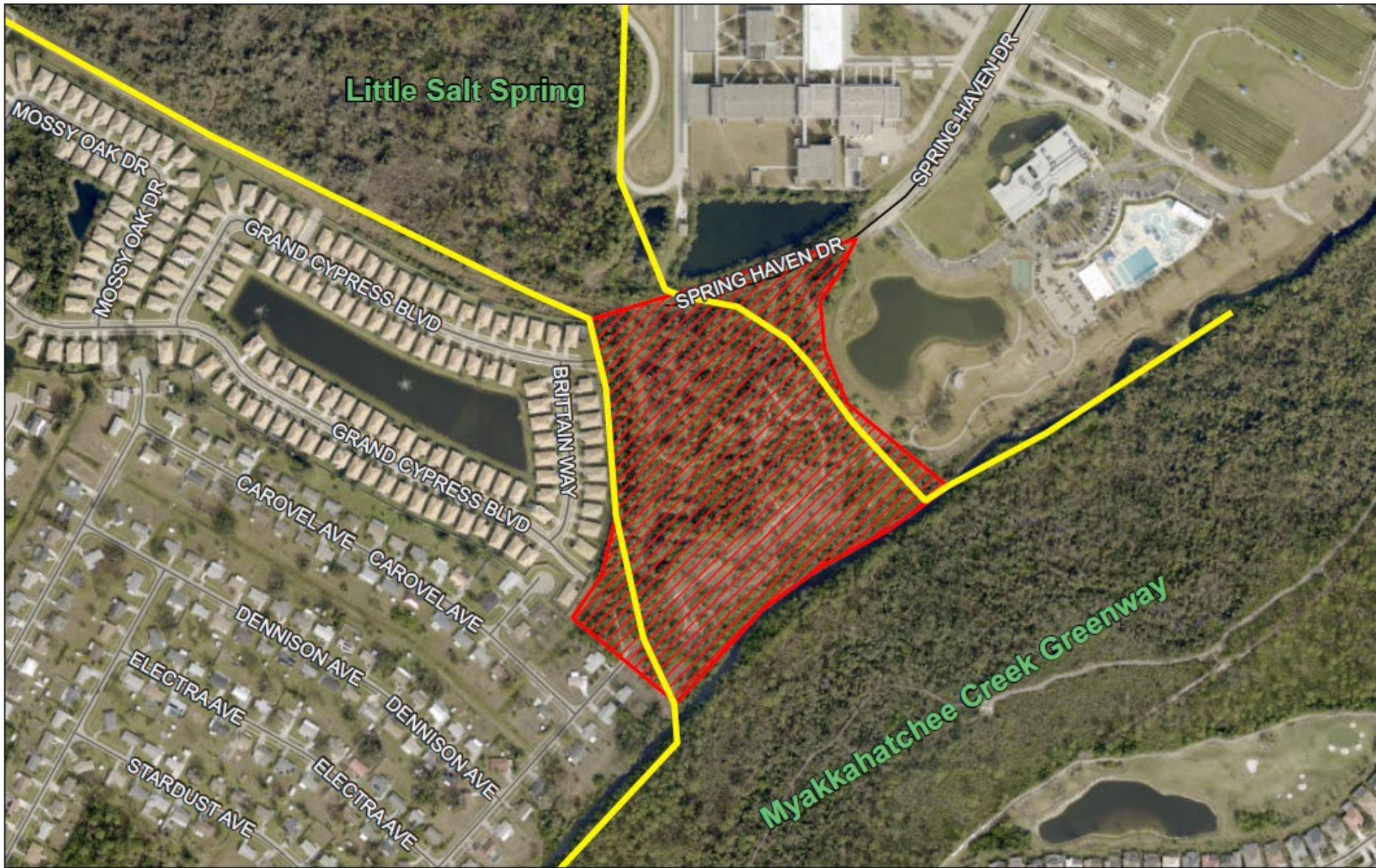
 30 Privately Owned Properties (SKS INVESTMENT PROPERTIES LLC)

 City Owned Property



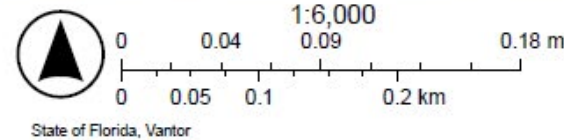
Esri Community Maps Contributors, University of South Florida, Sarasota County GIS, FDEP, © OpenStreetMap, Microsoft, Esri, TomTom, Garmin,

Greenway Corridor Bottleneck



4/3/2026

North Port Streets — Local Roads
Major Roads





Ecological Description

- Overgrown scrubby flatwoods habitat
- Bordered by Myakkahatchee Creek to the east
- Stormwater ponds to the north and west
- Supports foraging habitat for gopher tortoises and other animals
- Potential habitat for Florida scrub-jays
- Significant wildlife corridor



Conservation Importance

- Scrubby flatwoods are increasingly rare in the region
- Florida scrub-jay presence documented less than a mile away (2000, 2004, 2006 surveys)
- Protects habitat for state and federally listed threatened species
- Expands native habitat along Myakkahatchee Creek





Potential Future Considerations

- Proposed Uses & Management Considerations
- Habitat preservation for gopher tortoises and potentially scrub-jays
- Opportunities for birding and wildlife viewing
- Greenway connectivity to Myakkahatchee Creek
- Potential management needs:
 - Public access planning
 - Coordination with adjacent residential areas



Cultural & Archaeological Significance

- Little Salt Spring contains evidence of human activity dating back 12,000 years
- Middle Archaic period (5,500–8,000 years ago)
- Recognized as a nationally significant archaeological site
- Protecting the corridor preserves irreplaceable cultural heritage



Wildlife Documentation

Game-camera data sources (2017–present) confirms presence of:

- Bobcat
- White-tailed deer
- Wild turkey
- Raccoon
- Armadillo
- Squirrel
- Gopher tortoise (multiple burrows in the area documented)

These species rely on uninterrupted habitat connectivity.

An aerial photograph showing a river flowing through a landscape. On the left bank, there is a road with several cars and some buildings. The right bank is heavily forested with green trees. The river is dark and flows from the top left towards the bottom right. In the background, more residential areas and a bridge are visible.

Possible Development Threats to the Corridor

- Habitat fragmentation
- Increased potential future wildlife-vehicle collisions
- Loss of ecological connectivity
- Noise and light pollution
- Inability to place conservation easements on privately owned land
- Multiple property owners complicate efforts to achieve a unified conservation outcome



Status Update

- Sarasota County determined that Environmentally Sensitive Lands Protection Program (ESLPP) funds cannot be used
- Property owner requesting above-appraisal value
- No other public acquisition mechanisms left
- Eminent domain may be the only practical path to ensure future corridor protection





Option 1: Provide Direction to Staff to Pursue Eminent Domain

Pros:

- Ensures long term protection of a critical ecological and cultural corridor.
- Eliminates uncertainty created by stalled negotiations and fragmented ownership.
- Prevents future incompatible development that could sever connectivity.
- Provides a clear, enforceable path to secure land needed for public benefit.
- Strengthens the City's ability to implement adopted plans and conservation goals.
- Creates a consistent management framework across all parcels in the corridor.
- Subject to the availability of funds and project priorities, the acquisition initiative could be funded by the Environmental Protection Fund.



Option 1: Provide Direction to Staff to Pursue Eminent Domain (Continued)

Cons:

- May generate public concern or opposition from affected property owners.
- Will require significant staff time for legal coordination and case preparation.
- Legal challenges to eminent domain could extend the timeline acquisition or result in a determination that the project lacks legitimate public use or other outcome preventing acquisition.
- May set a precedent that influences expectations for future acquisitions.



Option 2: Decline to Provide Staff Direction to Pursue Eminent Domain

Pros:

- Prevents escalation of tensions with owners who oppose public acquisition.
- Reduces short term workload for staff by not initiating a complex legal process.
- Maintains flexibility if city priorities or Commission direction shift later.



Option 2: Decline to Provide Staff Direction to Pursue Eminent Domain (Continued)

Cons:


- Continued uncertainty around long-term protection of the corridor.
- If the Commission chooses to initiate eminent domain in the future, acquisition costs could increase.
- Risk of irreversible impacts if owners alter, clear, or develop the land.
- Weakens regional ecological connectivity, undermining broader environmental planning goals.

Summary: Benefits vs. Drawbacks

Benefits of Eminent Domain Direction to Staff

- Ensures long-term protection of a critical ecological and cultural corridor
- Eliminates uncertainty from stalled negotiations and fragmented ownership
- Prevents incompatible development that could sever wildlife connectivity
- Provides a clear, enforceable path to acquisition after years of stalled negotiations
- Strengthens the City's ability to implement adopted conservation goals

Drawbacks / Considerations

- Potential for public concern or opposition from affected property owners
 - Requires significant staff time for legal coordination and case preparation
 - Legal challenges could extend the timeline or prevent acquisition
 - May influence expectations for future acquisitions
- 



Staff Recommendation

- The Commission is asked to provide direction to staff on whether to pursue eminent domain (Option 1) or decline to provide such direction (Option 2).
- The Spring Haven corridor remains a critical ecological and cultural resource requiring long-term protection.
- Voluntary acquisition efforts have been unsuccessful.
- No alternative public funding or acquisition mechanisms are currently available.
- Eminent domain is the only remaining mechanism available should the Commission direct staff to pursue it.
- Funding is available in the Environmental Protection Fund if the Commission chooses to proceed.





Thank you! Questions?