

Visitor Center Project at Osprey Junction Trailhead Park

The 10-acre Park property was purchased by the County in 2008. Three structures were on the SW corner of the property – a house with attached garage, maintenance building and greenhouse. Woods, open areas and two ponds were on the remaining land.

A concept plan for the park was developed in 2010 by Sarasota County Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources which included the house designated as a proposed “Visitor Center” to be open to the public at some future date when funding for development became available. Various uses of the “Visitor Center” would be determined by public input.

The Park was named Osprey Junction Trailhead and officially opened in 2013 with a fenced vehicle parking area of grass, picnic tables, bicycle racks, shade structure, water fountain and information kiosk, all at the East end of the park near The Legacy Trail. Public access was not allowed to the house, maintenance building and greenhouse and that prohibition remains today. The Park has been closed since August 2017 because of the Bay Street extension project which is expected to be completed in December 2018.

In May 2018 a group of volunteers that worked at the Park for several years organized Friends of Osprey Junction Trailhead (FOJT) with a mission to support, promote and enhance the Park. One of the FOJT goals is to support the development and operation of a Visitor Center at the Park. There are currently eight volunteers on the FOJT Leadership Team working on the Visitor Center Project with assigned responsibilities along with 25+ other volunteers.

FOJT developed a phased plan to convert the house into a Visitor Center and Sarasota County Parks approved work to begin on Phase 1 with a goal to open the Visitor Center in early 2019. FOJT partnered with Friends of Sarasota County Parks, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, to initiate a Targeted Donations Campaign.

FOJT also developed a use of facilities plan for the Visitor Center. The overall goal is to provide a variety of opportunities for the public to enjoy the Park and to increase public use of the Park. The plan includes public use areas for family parties, meetings, school trips, clubs and other organizations; education classes; displays and materials; rest and eating; art exhibits; volunteers providing visitor services. The grounds around the Visitor Center will be used to showcase and educate the public about Florida-Friendly Landscaping, butterfly, bird and rain gardens; display artwork and conduct art events; provide rest and picnic areas.