

Scenic Watch



News from
January
2022

Legal: "Is Tampa's tree canopy shrinking because of a change in state law?"



Photo: Tampa Bay Times

"Tree advocates and builders reached what was called a historic compromise on protecting the city's award-winning tree canopy in the spring of 2019. A week later, a new state law gutted much of Tampa's and other local governments' power to set rules about tree removals.

At the time, exasperated city officials and advocates raised concerns about the law's provisions allowing grand trees to be cut down as long as a certified arborist or landscape architect signed off, cutting city inspectors out of the process. Some large-scale removals that summer ratcheted up their fears.

Nearly three years later the city hopes to figure out if those fears were justified.

Brian Knox, the city's senior forester examiner, says an upcoming analysis of the city's canopy is planned for release in 2022. A similar analysis in 2016 found 32 percent of the city covered by tree canopy.

And while the data isn't in yet, Knox has a pretty good idea what it will say.

'I expect we will see a decline in the canopy,' Knox said.

It's not just the state law, he said. Tampa's hot development streak has also taken a toll as new houses or commercial developments often require the removal of mature shade trees. Although they're often replaced with younger trees (developers can also pay into a city tree-planting fund as an alternative), it can often take at least a decade for the canopy to be replenished.

Still, the state's preemption of the city's tree code, in place since the early 1970s, has likely had an effect, Knox said. How much of one is hard to know since the law has no provision for a property owner to inform the city if trees are removed because they're deemed dangerous to persons or property.

'We really don't have a way to monitor the information. We can't really factor the trees that are removed in our decision making,' Knox said. 'That's the part that makes it difficult.'

Taking her dog on daily walks through Davis Islands about six years ago first made Lorraine Parrino aware of the disappearing canopy in her neighborhood as mid-century homes were being replaced with much larger ones. She's since become active in the Tampa Tree Advocacy Group or T-TAG.

Parrino says she has seen ample evidence of healthy trees being taken down. And she thinks not only the state law, but a city government that has streamlined permits and other development-related tasks are responsible.

'Between one thing and another we're losing a lot of trees,' she said..."

-- Charlie Frago, Tampa Bay Times

[Read entire article](#)

"Brevard County close to fencing off Malabar Sanctuary over tree cutting permit"



Video: Fox 35 Orlando

"The Malabar Scrub Sanctuary is where the Florida scrub jay thrives. This sanctuary is specifically for protecting the beautiful blue and gray bird that exclusively calls Florida home.

The area has also become a popular place for bikers and hikers looking for shade-covered trails. Although, it's those trees causing a problem for the scrub jay population.

'It is the original Floridian,' said the Executive Director of Audubon Florida, Julie Wraithmell.

'You could lose scrub jays from that community altogether. That would just be tragic.'

Scrub jays live off of the scrub found on the ground; however, bird experts say the Malabar Sanctuary has too many trees that have led to overgrowth and have introduced more predators into the environment.

The Audubon Society says the restoration proposal for the land includes cutting down 10 to 20 trees as well as a controlled burn to restore the scrub jay habitat.

'It sounds a little counterintuitive to cut down trees in order to save birds but

scrub jays forge on the ground, and they are picked up by hawks perched in these high trees. They swoop down and eat the birds,' said Brevard County District 3 Commissioner John Tobia.

The Malabar Town Manager tells FOX 35 News that some are concerned the county wants to cut down too many trees.

The Town of Malabar is concerned thousands of trees will be cut down especially near the trails. In plans shared with FOX 35 News, certain shaded areas of the sanctuary could be thinned down to just one or two trees per acre...

This week Brevard County voted unanimously to fence up the sanctuary if a deal isn't struck by January 25th. They say they will charge Malabar roughly \$6,000 to do so.

Malabar will hold another town council meeting before that date to discuss actions moving forward. "

-- Fox 35 Orlando

[Read entire article or watch video](#)

Neighborhood Grass Roots: "JEA completes 'poles to holes' utility lines conversion in Ortega Point North community"



Photo: As seen in Resident Community News Group, Inc.

"JEA, AT&T and Comcast announced on Nov. 30 their completion of work to convert the existing overhead utility lines to underground in the Ortega Point North Overhead to Underground Utility Conversion Project...

The conversion project is a community-driven 'grass roots' project requested and organized by Ortega Point North neighborhood residents. A total of 75 percent of the property owners within the project area, which includes 122 parcels in Ortega Point and some blocks south of the Point, signed a petition in favor of paying a special assessment of more than \$20,000 each to convert overhead electric, telephone and cable television lines to underground utilities. The majority of the work took place along McGirts Boulevard, Ortega Boulevard, Grand Avenue, Bettes Circle and Ionic Avenue.

The petition/ordinance for assessing 100 percent of the property owners in the neighborhood for the project's costs was presented and approved by the Jacksonville City Council on June 25, 2019. The special assessment and financing costs for those property owners who financed their individual service lateral conversions will appear on property owners' next property tax bill following City Council approval...

JEA began undergrounding new residential power lines nearly five decades ago, when city-county government consolidation mandated it for new development. Jacksonville has around 3,000 miles of overhead power lines. In 2017 Scenic Jacksonville proposed a plan to underground about 3 percent of the lines each

year for the next 30 years, but currently the decision to convert - and to pay for it - is up to the desire of neighborhoods.

JEA's overhead to underground conversion program focuses on undergrounding overhead electric, telephone, cable television, communication or other overhead distribution line facilities located within the public rights of way in a defined neighborhood boundary. The program also provides a means for neighborhoods to finance the conversion of overhead utility lines to underground systems through a special assessment process, enacted by City Council in 2007. Additionally, property owners have the option of financing the additional cost of connecting the undergrounded utilities from the right of way to their property's structure."

-- Editor, Resident Community News Group, Inc.

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Legislation - SB 518 Clearwater Neighborhoods Coalition weighs in on restoring local control of tree removal and trimming



Photo: Florida Senate

"Background

In 2019, the Florida Legislature passed a law that banned local governments from enforcing many of their tree ordinances. This left cities and counties powerless to protect healthy trees from people with less than good intentions. The law led to abuses, including the clear-cutting of land and the removal of healthy trees that presented little, if any, risk to people or buildings. This is a Home Rule issue affecting the environment, the aesthetics of our neighborhoods and our beautiful trees.

The Solution

FL Senate Bill CS/SB 518 puts tree removal and trimming back into the hands of local government; not distant Tallahassee lawmakers. See links to analysis below. Next, it must pass in the Senate Government Oversight & Accountability Committee. Lucky for us, a local legislator, Senator Jeff Brandes chairs this committee.

How You Can Help

Please call his local office at (727) 563-2100 and/or send a quick email to say: I want my city to be able to regulate tree removal. Please agenda the bill in Governmental Oversight & Accountability. Here's his email address: brandes.jeff.web@flsenate.gov Thank you for your advocacy!

Analysis

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/518/Analyses/2022s00518.ca.PDF>

Tracking

<https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/518>"

-- Clearwater Neighborhoods Coalition

[Visit Clearwater Neighborhoods Coalition](#)

1000 Friends of Florida's Transportation Policy,
Planning and Implementation Report

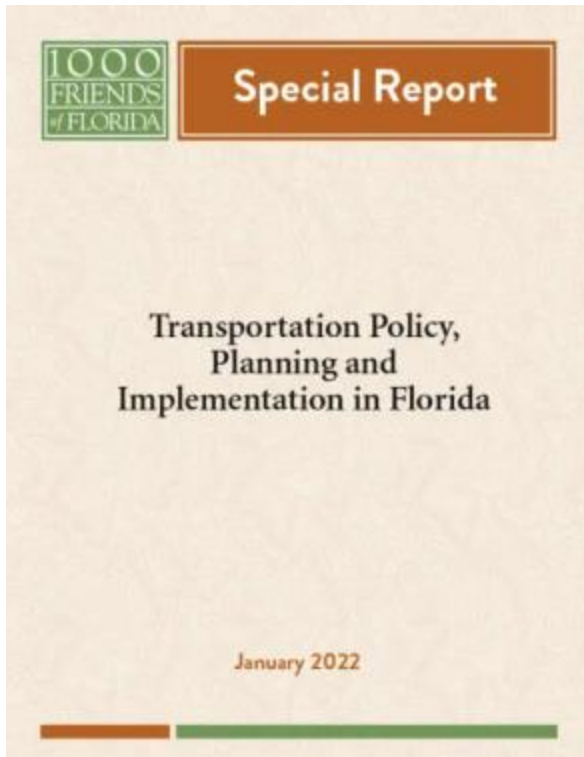


Photo: 1000 Friends of Florida

"This primer provides a brief overview of major components of Florida's transportation policy, planning and implementation process. Policy planning typically involves developing high level plans to address needs for and appropriate means of transportation within a given geographic area. Project plans entail evaluation, planning, design and implementation for a specific corridor, roadway, bike trail or other means of transportation. Many transportation processes and projects rely on an amalgam of federal, state and local public funding so multiple review processes may apply and include opportunities for public input. As is always the case, the earlier citizens engage in the process the greater the chance of making a difference in the outcome."

-- 1000 Friends of Florida

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Advertising in the rain? Arriving across the country in 2022:

"Rentbrella Keeps The Drops Off Your Head - For Free If You Return It In Time"



Photo: Rentbrella in Forbes

"If you've ever left the house, you can relate: It starts to rain and you don't have an umbrella.

You can find something to shield yourself (the ol' coat over the head). Or grab the umbrella you brought with you. Whoops, you forgot it? Maybe you can find one at a local store, before you're soaked to the bone.

Or if you're in Manhattan, New York City, you can grab one from a Rentbrella share station. Use the umbrella to free for 24 hours or keep it for an extra \$2 per day. After three days, you'll be charged \$16 and can keep it forever.

Besides Manhattan, where there are more than 35 Rentbrella sharing stations in high-traffic areas, Rentbrella also has 400-plus sharing stations with 40,000 umbrellas across São Paulo, Brazil, where it got its start in 2018. And the mobility and technology company has plans for many more locations.

'We have an ambitious expansion plan with the goal of expanding to dozens of cities across the U.S. and Europe over the next few years,' says Freddy Marcos, who cofounded Rentbrella with Nathan Janovich.

'In the United States, we see cities like Seattle, Chicago, Atlanta, Miami, Philadelphia, Washington, Houston, Boston, among others,' Marcos says. 'In Europe, we're starting in London in the first half of 2022 and then moving to other rainy and highly populated cities...'

So how does Rentbrella make money if its umbrellas are potentially free?

'Our revenue model is based on brand advertising and sponsorship on our umbrellas,' Marcos says. "In Brazil, our umbrellas are sponsored by the country's biggest insurance company, Unimed...'

The idea for Rentbrella was born as cofounder Janovich was getting off the subway, Marcos says.

'There were hundreds of people huddled at the door because it was raining, and as he saw a shared bike passing by, he thought: 'If no one needs a bike of their own to get around, why need an umbrella?'

'At that moment, he called me, and I suggested using the umbrellas as a new advertising vehicle that brings mobility and protection for users and a high impact media experience for brands.'"

-- Jeff Kart, Forbes

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