



OLD HOMOSASSA



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Community Snapshot

VISION: The community envisions a “Walk to the River” intended to provide a sense of pride and identity to the historic community and to serve as an example to future development in the area.”

DESIGNATION: 2001

APPLICANT: Citrus County

PARTNERS: The Homosassa Civic Club; Citrus County; the Homosassa Water District Board; FWC; local residents and business owners.

STATUS: Inactive; although there has been recent interest on the part of Citrus County to reactivate the committee and hold future visioning meetings.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Old Homosassa Community Plan was included in the Citrus County Comprehensive Plan; County adopted an overlay district and design standards; a landmark sign and information kiosk were constructed.

CURRENT CHALLENGES: Budget cuts impede the program manager from attending statewide Waterfront’s meetings; County no longer funds a full-time position dedicated to local Waterfront’s activities.

FLORIDA ASSESSMENT OF COASTAL TRENDS DATA:

Number of Active Volunteers: 6

Public Dollars Contributed: \$103,500

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Old Homosassa is a small pocket of the “Old Florida” located off the beaten path near Florida’s Gulf Coast in Citrus County. Although it does not have a defined center or edge, Old Homosassa still retains a “sense of place.” Meandering through winding rural roads canopied by live oak trees and Spanish moss, you eventually find yourself in the middle of a small artist colony, whose works include wonderful metallic fountains and fish sculptures, colorful hand-blown glass, and pottery. In the same cluster of old buildings, you can view a few alligators in their own personal swimming pool, sign up for a boat tour or scuba diving lessons, or try the area’s famous smoked mullet.

Along this journey, you can also view the ruins of the old sugar mill owned and operated by David Levy Yulee, one of Florida’s first senators. Yulee, who once owned several thousand acres in Homosassa, was responsible for the development of another Waterfronts Community — Fernandina Beach in Nassau County in Northeast Florida. Yulee eventually sold the Homosassa property, which was platted as a traditional town by three developers from the northeast in 1886. They envisioned a resort town, not unlike the neo-traditional resort towns that popped up along Florida’s Panhandle late in the 20th Century. Elements of

the original plat call for short, pedestrian-oriented blocks that connect to the waterfront. Although the plat was never fully implemented, remnants of the street pattern are visible today.

Strangely out of place is a newly constructed faux Mediterranean-style condominium complex. This type of development, along with the extension of a central sewer service and the impending alignment of the Suncoast Parkway Extension, sparked fear and unity in the residents of Homosassa. Along with other actions to prevent over-development, the community applied for Waterfronts Florida designation in 2001.

Homosassa is not an incorporated city, and therefore the Waterfronts application was sponsored by Citrus County. The County appointed a staff member as the program manager, appointed a steering committee, and held a series of workshops to define the vision for the community.

The main goal of the Homosassa Waterfronts Partnership was to preserve the community’s character, along with protecting its environmentally sensitive resources, promoting redevelopment, and public recreation and access to the river, re-establishing the design elements of the original plat, and supporting commercial fishing.



To that end, the County adopted a redevelopment plan and zoning overlay for the area. The overlay limits some uses such as mobile home parks, multi-family dwellings, and hotels, and allows single family and live/work units and “water-related” uses, such as bait and tackle stores, fish camps, dive shops, campgrounds, and seafood processing plants. The overlay also regulates how buildings are placed on a lot, how they relate to the waterfront, building materials, lighting, signage, and a building’s height and scale.

The Redevelopment Plan was incorporated into the County’s Comprehensive Plan. The Plan incorporates three study areas to implement the goals the community identified — Walk to the River, the core study area, and the proposed overlay district.

Walk to the River includes the Yulee Drive Corridor to the County boat ramp facility on the Homosassa River and incorporates four subareas; a fishing village, a river portal, an artist colony/business district, and a heritage portal. Identified as the central area of Old Homosassa, this corridor includes historical elements, such as the sugar mill ruins, that give the town its unique character.

The core study area includes the area contained in the original 1886 plat and the overlay district stretches just beyond the area known as Old Homosassa. A few “sticks and bricks” projects were taken on in the first two years of the community’s participation in the program. The Committee coordinated staff and volunteers to design and install the landmark sign at the center of Old Homosassa. Citrus County Community Development staff provided graphic design for the sign face, with completion of the sign made possible by donations from local



businesses, and a local electrician donated lighting for the sign. Landscaping was provided by a grant to the County for tree replacement. Additional financial assistance funded design and construction of the information kiosk at the county boat ramp parking area. Community Development staff provided graphic design of the permanent acknowledgement sign and a local artist has donated a metallic fish sculpture for a weathervane. Displays were provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (manatee protection and other environmental issues), the Homosassa Civic Club (local recreation), and Citrus County (heritage). The Walk to the River entrance was enhanced by the Homosassa Water District Board’s agreement to paint the water tower to be similar to the landmark sign.

In the last few years, redevelopment of the old Riverside Resort has become a contentious issue in the community. Several public meetings were held over the design of the redevelopment of the site. Since then, the steering committee has not met on a regular basis and County staff has had little time to devote to management of the program due to severe budget cuts. However, the area still plugs along as a sleepy, out-of-the-way tourist destination for those who are looking for the real Florida.



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