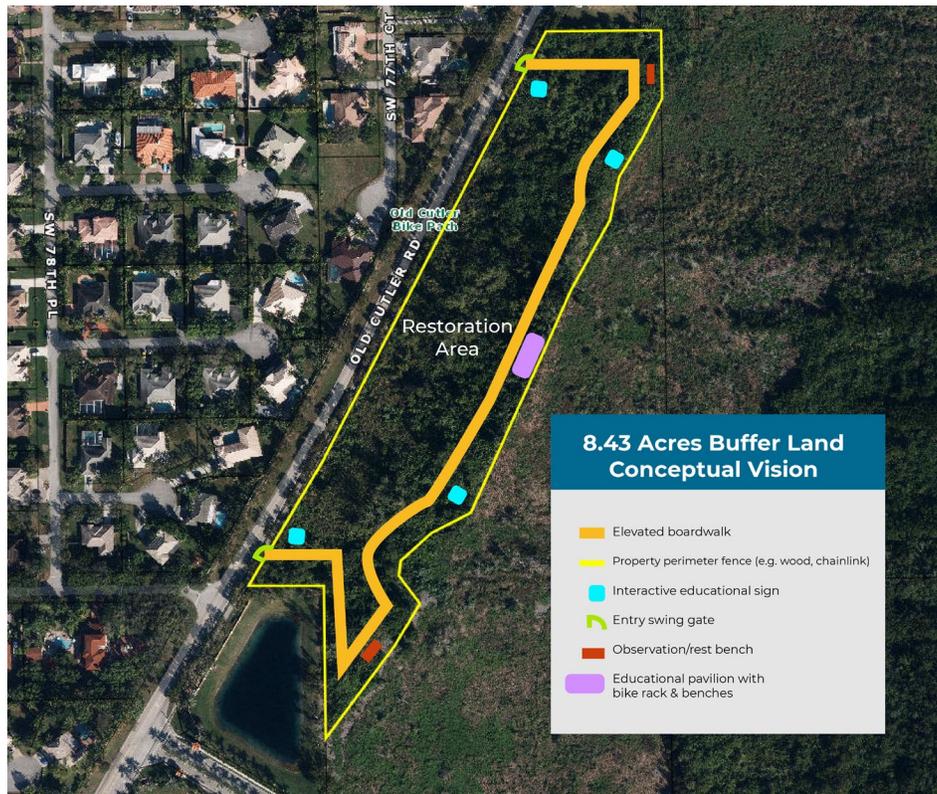




2021-02

State Legislative Session Funding Request

Project: Cutler Bay Buffer Land Acquisition (Florida Department of Environmental Protection Florida Communities Trust Grant Application)





OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

Rafael G. Casals, ICMA-CM, CFM
Town Manager

Buffer Land Acquisition Project

Amount Requested: \$1,500,000.00 (17.65%)
Match funding available: \$6,995,852.55 (82.35%)
Total Project Cost: \$8,495,852.55

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Project Abstract:

The Town of Cutler Bay (the “Town”) is requesting \$1,500,000.00 to acquire approximately 8.435 acres of environmentally endangered buffer land, along the historic Old Cutler Road buffering the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands. The Town Council approved the purchase of the land for \$8.45 Million (Town Resolution No. 20-18).

The goal of this project is to protect the buffer land property from development, preserve it for its environmental value and further the Town’s resiliency efforts. The Town envisions a public open space dedicated to the perpetual conservation of the community’s natural resources and adjacent wetlands.

Project Summary:

The Town purchased the land in December, 2020. The planning of the passive park elements will take place over the Spring and Summer of 2021, followed by the cleaning and restoration of the property – removing non-native vegetation and replacing it with native species of plants and trees. Implementation of the plans for the passive park space (benches, walkways, educational kiosks, etc.) will follow thereafter. In addition to providing a green, open recreational space the project will improve the quality of the surface waters of Biscayne Bay and mitigate flood hazards to the area.

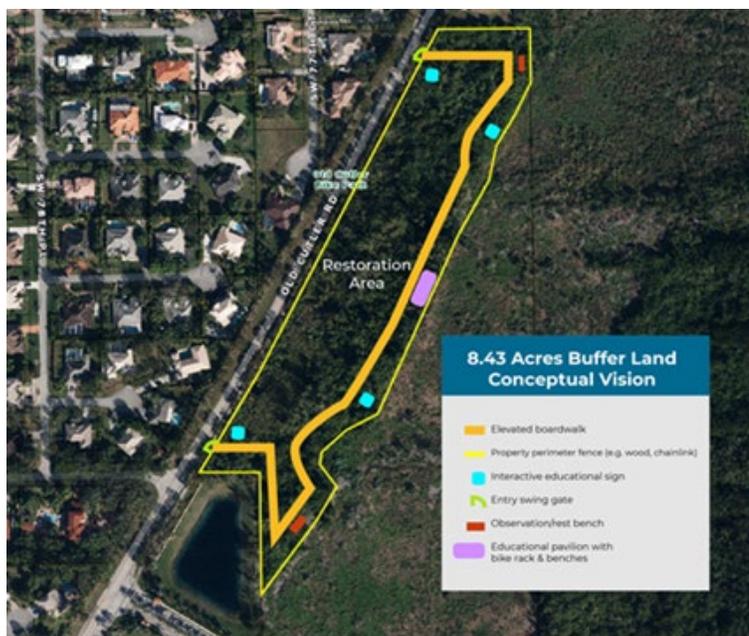
The vacant land is within the “Residential–Conservation” overlay land use designation which allows development rights to be transferred to other areas within the Town of Cutler Bay as a means of encouraging environmental conservation of the property.



However, until such time as the property is acquired or otherwise encumbered for conservation purposes, it can be developed in accordance with the underlying “Low-Density Residential” land use designation and SR zoning designation which allows single-family residential development up to five dwelling units per acre. At five dwelling units per acre, up to 40 single-family residential units may be constructed in the highly vulnerable flood zone area with a conservatively estimated value of \$700,000.00 per unit based on the current price of homes in the area. Since 2019, the Town has worked collaboratively with the current property owner to mitigate flood loss in this area. These efforts led to the Town’s decision to purchase the property.

This 8.435-acre property is connected to adjacent neighborhoods and existing publicly owned conservation lands that expand the local ecological corridor. It is adjacent to the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands (BBCW), a component of Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), the largest hydrologic restoration project ever undertaken in the United States and is identified by the US Army Corps of Engineers as a natural buffer to mitigate sea-level rise. During a recent evaluation of the project, no wildlife was directly observed; however, since the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is restoring both wetland and upland habitat on the adjacent property to the east; a variety of wildlife species, including migratory birds, wading birds, and raptors, would be expected to use the application area for roosting and possibly nesting because of the proximity of restored wetlands. This property is also adjacent to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Strategic Habitat Conservation Area.

Location Map:





OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

Rafael G. Casals, ICMA-CM, CFM

Town Manager

Project Benefits:

The Town envisions a preservation space with natural walking trails, native trees and fauna, permeable parking, and a pavilion with educational signage. The introduction of interactive educational signage increases awareness among residents and visitors to the area about the native and migratory wildlife, wetland habitat, and restoration efforts. The project has the potential to link bicyclists to three (3) State bike trails and will serve as an educational "learning lab" for students attending local schools. The long term educational and conservation outcome of this project is the creation of usable greenspace for residents, visitors, and local schools.

Match Funding Available:

The Town commits \$6,995,852.55 (82.35%) of the total estimated cost of \$8,495,852.55 as match funding. This funding is obtained through the Town's Capital Improvements Revenue Bond/Loan Issuance (Town Ordinance No. 20-09).

