



To support, promote, enhance and protect  
The Legacy Trail, a Sarasota County Park,  
and its trail connectors now and  
for future generations.

## THE LEGACY TRAIL: FROM VISION TO REALITY

### 13th Sarasota County Sustainable Communities Communities Workshop

The Legacy Trail is a 10.5 mile long rails-to-trails multi-use paved path in Sarasota County, connecting to the nine mile long Venetian Waterway Park trail in Venice. It attracts 225,000 uses per year.

A November 6th, 2018 general election ballot asked County voters to approve up to a \$65M bond to extend the Legacy Trail another eight miles to downtown Sarasota, with overpasses and amenities, and better connection to North Port. The bond would be repaid through property taxes over 20 years.

The Friends of the Legacy Trail (FLT), as the grassroots community catalyst and driving force for this initiative, is euphoric to report that 71% OF SARASOTA COUNTY VOTERS, 99% OF THE PRECINCTS VOTED YES!

How does a small group of community activists convince local governments and 417,000 residents to expand a multi-use trail?

Here's our recipe for success, backed by tens of thousands of hours of hard work over six years:

- **Recruit passionate board members.** Let each oversee one facet of the organization, turn them loose, and trust their efforts. Our eight committees: Trail Extension, Safety, Marketing, Trail Maintenance/Enhancement, Membership, Public Meetings, Volunteers, and Information Technology.
- **Put some skin in the game.** We asked and the County Commissioners agreed to study the feasibility to extend the trail along the unused rail corridor to downtown Sarasota, provided we raise (we did) half the \$150,000 cost, demonstrating community support.
- **Grow the membership and volunteer base.** We focused on organizational growth, now with 1,000+ dues-paying members and 300+ volunteers. We gained recognition as a political force in the community, e.g., when our supporters wore yellow FLT shirts at key County meetings.
- **Engage local governments in a continuing dialogue.** We met individually with government leaders and staff to establish a dialogue, discuss mutual opportunities, and address concerns.
- **Raise the organization's profile in the community.** Our Speakers Bureau delivered a five-minute "elevator" speech or longer Power Point presentation

to businesses, community groups, and home owner associations. For four years, we participated in countless farmers markets, neighborhood and major events across the county like food festivals, health fairs, and business expos. We sponsored helmet-fitting giveaways for kids.

- **Become a stand-alone charitable organization.** FLT started as a chapter of the Friends of Sarasota County Parks. We became an independent 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization in 2015, able to raise tax deductible contributions.
- **Find friends in high places.** The County partnered with the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a nationwide organization that creates parks, to negotiate acquisition of the rail corridor. TPL brought us a strategic level of excellence, expertise, personnel, and resources. We worked with three prominent local area charitable foundations.
- **Establish a political action committee.** As a 501(c)(3), we were limited by law in saying VOTE YES for the referendum. TPL established a political committee with individuals from across the political spectrum who were recognized and respected in the community. They raised funds, sought endorsements, and ran the Vote Yes campaign.
- **Develop a succinct, easily communicated core message.** We emphasized safety for trail users and motorists, enhanced property values and quality of life, and that funds could only be used to extend the trail and its connections.
- **Facilitate communication with volunteers and the general public.** Our [FLT web site](#), [monthly newsletter](#) and social media presence (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) offers a wealth of fresh, engaging content. Our referendum FAQ featured a map of the planned extension.
- **Engage the local news media.** We met local print media editorial staff and columnists, receiving favorable coverage. We had many letters to the editor published. We did local radio and television interviews and panel discussions.
- **Seek political party support.** We remained bipartisan!
- **Be creative.** Our [Square Foot Campaign](#) allows individuals to “buy” a \$20 tax deductible square foot of the extension, receiving a certificate with the precise GPS coordinates of their square foot. We have raised \$59,000 from 550+ donors, demonstrating community commitment.
- **If you don’t count, you won’t count.** We discovered our old passive infrared counters were substantially undercounting. We donated new electronic counters to the County, developed a new statistical algorithm on trail usage. The [County](#) adopted our new count, a 47% increase over previous years.

We were proud recipients of the Florida Bicycle Association 2015 Trail Promoter of the Year. To our fellow trail builders, WE DID IT. YOU CAN ALSO!

The County expects to complete the extension in 2024.