

## EVERGLADES CITY TRAIL TOWN – Five Year Update – Feb 2024



As we begin our 5<sup>th</sup> year as a designated Florida Trail Town, we take great pride in the work we have accomplished. Some have asked what the benefits are of being a Trail Town and have you noticed any significant changes in your community. Benefits include improving the quality of life by offering more recreational opportunities and, yes, changes have been made as discussed below.

The *Everglades* are a destination for tourists seeking to experience the wonders and diversity of the ecosystem found here in southwest Florida. Everglades City is the hub to seven national and state parks and preserves and provides all the amenities for locals and tourists alike to enjoy while exploring nature by biking, paddling, or hiking. The Everglades Area Visitor Center and Trail Town Headquarters provides a wealth of information to tourists from around the world. A new Coffee Shop opened in vacant space next to the Visitor Center in January, offering numerous healthy choices. Many customers walk or bike to the restaurant daily.



Phase 2 of our Everglades City Bike Ped Master Plan was recently completed with a new sidewalk along the east side of Copeland Avenue South from the center of town to the Chokoloskee Bridge. Part of Phase 3 was completed with a Road Diet along Copeland Avenue North, reducing 4 lanes to 2 with a 11' travel lane, a 5' buffer, and a 5' bike lane. The local newspaper recently commented on the new improvements: *“The Master Plan underlines the broader impact of this initiative, stating, ‘A well-developed system of sidewalks and bike paths will provide additional economic benefits to our local businesses and will complement the historical and cultural assets of the community.’ The ripple effects of this project extend beyond the physical infrastructure, contributing to the socio-economic vibrancy of Everglades City. As the finishing touches are added to this ambitious project, Everglades City is poised to become not just a haven for natural beauty but a model for communities looking to embrace sustainable and pedestrian-friendly urban planning.”*

Florida Senate Bill 106 expanded the opportunities for the FGTS to connect with the Florida Wildlife Corridor and to expand funding for SUN trails. The Collier to Polk Regional Trail aligns with the definition of regionally significant trails as outlined in SB106. The Collier to Polk Regional Trail will add 170 miles of trail and link seven counties. A 42-mile additional corridor connecting to the south end of the proposed trail would form a connection from Immokalee to Everglades City. This additional corridor along SR 29 would pass along various environmental areas including Big Cypress National Preserve and Fakahatchee Strand State Park.

