THE RUSKIN COMMUNITY PLAN

Introduction

Ruskin is a historic community situated on the shores of Tampa Bay, the Little Manatee River and the Ruskin Inlet, approximately 16 miles southeast of Tampa. The Ruskin Community Plan area is shown on the attached Community Plan Area Map.

Ruskin was founded in 1908 and is named for John Ruskin, an English writer and critic who called for social reform and espoused the need for higher education. Historically, Ruskin has been an agricultural and fishing community. Today, while agriculture is still actively practiced, a variety of land uses exist, including commercial, light industrial, office and residential. Approximately 1,148 acres are designated as Natural Preservation, including significant lands along the Little Manatee River. Most commercial uses are along US 41 and College Avenue (primarily closer to I-75). The older “historic” portion of Ruskin is located east of US 41 along the Ruskin Inlet. The Bahia Beach resort is located on the shores of Tampa Bay at the western end of the community. South Shore Corporate Park is located on the eastern end of the community adjacent to the I-75/College Avenue interchange.

The Ruskin Community Plan Area (approximately 21 square miles including natural preserves) has been divided into four neighborhood areas. The first is located west of US 41 and, as noted above, includes older development and the Bahia Beach resort. The second area is located east of US 41 and north of College Avenue. This area includes a variety of land uses and housing types. The third area is generally located east of US 41, south of College Avenue, and northwest of I-75. This area is transitioning from agriculture to residential uses. The fourth area is located southeast of I-75, outside the County’s Urban Service Area. This area has on-going agricultural activities along with residential and some limited commercial uses. These areas are shown on the attached Ruskin Neighborhood Area Map.

In 2000 the Ruskin Community Plan Area had 5,632 dwelling units and a population of 9,518 people. Individuals identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino comprised approximately 37% of the total population. Projections for the year 2025 call for a total of 9,178 dwelling units with a population of 21,769.

Major roadways in Ruskin include US 41 and I-75 which connect Ruskin to communities in the north and south. College Avenue, Shell Point Road and 19th Avenue are the major east-west connectors. The SouthShore Area Wide Plan identifies new north/south roadways, generally through the South Shore Corporate Park development, that will link College Avenue north to Big Bend Road.

The Ruskin Community Plan (Plan) was developed by dedicated individuals who volunteered their time for the future of their community. The Plan represents a community-based vision and direction for the future of Ruskin. The Ruskin

Ruskin Community Vision Statement

Ruskin will continue to be a community that preserves its small-town character, celebrates its unique history and agricultural past, embraces its multi-cultural diversity and protects its abundant natural resources. The Ruskin community values nature above commercialism; dark, star-filled skies at night above the glare of urban lights; and the sound of crickets and frogs above the noise of traffic.

The history of Ruskin is unique, having been settled by the Common Good Society with principles based on the social ideas of John Ruskin along with the teachings of Ruskin College. Ruskin has a rich fishing and agricultural heritage. Internationally significant pre-historic fossils have been discovered by Frank Garcia.

Our top priority is the protection and preservation of our natural resources, including our pristine Little Manatee River corridor, which is teeming with life; Marsh Creek and the public lands around it; Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve; the Tampa Bay estuary; the wildlife that lives among us on land, in the water and the sky; the ELAPP lands, significant wildlife habitat, and other natural areas, parks and green space within and around our community. We support the acquisition of additional land for preservation, restoration, natural habitat and parks.

We are proud to be a multi-cultural community and wish to highlight this feature as we develop. We embrace our diversity and welcome everyone who wishes to participate in, and contribute to our community. Our goal is to attract citizens who "put down roots" and become involved in the larger community. Growth can only be good for Ruskin if it attracts people who will contribute meaningfully to the community -- citizens who will spend, not just their money, but their time here, in Ruskin.

We envision a community extravagantly lavished with trees and lush landscapes of native Florida plants, both existing and new. We will educate our citizens on native plant species and strive to keep existing trees and native flora as development occurs.

We wish to become a destination for eco-tourism, providing opportunities for the enjoyment of our natural areas, and recreation that treads lightly on the environment. Our desire is to see the development of trails around and through the community with a large loop that meanders along the river connecting with the South Coast Greenway coming south and linking with Shell Point and Simmons Park.

We enjoy living free from the frustrations of rush-hour traffic and wish to maintain a low volume of traffic as we grow. We wish to control speeding vehicles by building two lane streets and retaining those two lane streets that now exist. We want our entire community to be safe and enjoyable for walking and bicycling, with a pedestrian-friendly downtown, accessible to the disabled.
Our historic rural lifestyle and small-town character are dear to us. We are striving to develop our community as a village that retains rural characteristics is unsegregated and interconnected into one whole community. We intend to avoid becoming a bedroom community of cookie-cutter suburbs.

We wish to see our downtown as pedestrian friendly with mixed-uses and made up of small businesses as opposed to “big-box” stores. The Marsh Creek waterfront will allow for the placement of shops and cafes nearby, resulting in a very attractive “village center.” Our waterfront defines Ruskin, and we want to “showcase” it, thereby making it the nucleus of the community. We wish to see a museum that collects, preserves and presents our history that is of immense value to all. This would become part of the Town center for Ruskin and lead to establishing cohesion and a sense of place. There will be a theater, near the downtown, which would be a meeting place, a venue for performances, along with an Art and History museum that will showcase the artists and craftsmen in Ruskin and possibly attract more.

We want to encourage commercial development to focus on our downtown, our Town center rather than encourage further commercial development on SR 674 and Shell Point Road.

Our plan identifies four distinct neighborhoods, each having a defined character that provides home-styles serving all Ruskin residents. The scale and type of residential development shall vary according to the character of each of the four neighborhoods that were identified during our community mapping exercise.

The “Old Ruskin” neighborhood west of downtown will feature lower density single family housing in keeping with the traditional character of the area. The area east of downtown and west of the I-75 employment center will accommodate a variety of housing types including multi-family and entry level housing. The area south of College Avenue will accommodate a more suburban style, and type, of residential development with environmental safeguards for the redevelopment of property along the Little Manatee River. The area southeast of I-75 will retain its rural and agricultural character and provide for enhanced interaction and access to the publicly owned lands adjacent to the Little Manatee.

**Ruskin Community Plan Goals and Strategies**

**Goal 1: Downtown Ruskin** – Revitalize Ruskin’s business center along US 41, enhance the appearance of the district, and promote business growth that is compatible with our small town community.

*Strategies:*
- Establish a mixed-use, walkable and pedestrian friendly Town Center.
- Develop and implement the Master Plan for the Ruskin Town Center.
• Develop common design and landscape standards for commercial development along US 41 outside the Town Center.
• Upgrade the current sewer system to facilitate redevelopment of the business center and Town Center.
• Ensure that improvements to US 41 are compatible with the revitalization of Ruskin’s historic business center. Seek alternatives to expansion of US 41.
  ▪ Limit US 41 to two through lanes in each direction.
  ▪ Develop 2nd and 3rd Streets as a local alternative to US 41 with direct connection to US 41.
• Encourage commercial development and redevelopment within downtown Ruskin and the Town Center and direct commercial development away from Shell Point Road West and 19th Avenue N.W.
• Encourage locally owned businesses to locate within Ruskin’s historic business corridor and Town Center.
• Establish gateways, located to provide a sense of arrival.

**Goal 2. Economic Development** – Provide opportunities for business growth and jobs in the Ruskin community.

*Strategies:*
• Ensure that there are appropriate land areas zoned for office and light industrial development.
• Support eco-tourism featuring Ruskin’s natural resources, such as the Little Manatee River, Tampa Bay, the Ruskin Inlet, Marsh Creek, wildlife and wildlife habitat, parks, nature preserves and greenways and blueways trails, within and around our community.
• Promote commercial development at a scale and design that reflects the character of the community. Ensure that future commercial development avoids “strip” development patterns.
• Recognize Bahia Beach as a resort area that contributes to the economy of Ruskin.

**Goal 3. Environment** – Protect and enhance Ruskin’s natural environment and ensure that it remains an integral part of the community.

*Strategies:*
• Density calculations will be based on upland areas and no density credits will be assigned to wetland areas for new development within the Ruskin Community Plan area.
• Support the restoration of Marsh Creek and identify possible public uses.
  ▪ Support surveying Marsh Creek to determine the extent of County-owned property.
  ▪ Support replacing the US 41 and 2nd Street culverts to improve water flow and to provide pedestrian access to Marsh Creek.
• Implement the Hillsborough County Greenways Master Plan within the Ruskin Community.
• Support continued acquisition and restoration of environmentally valuable, or sensitive, lands by the County’s Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program, the Southwest Florida Water Management District and Florida Communities Trust, and encourage connection of existing publicly owned lands to form a greenway system.
• Support regulations to enhance protection of the Little Manatee River.
• Enhance and expand passive and low-impact access to the Ruskin waterfront, including the Little Manatee and Marsh Creek shorelines.
• Minimize the impact of recreation facilities on the Little Manatee River by encouraging passive uses, such as hiking, nature study, fishing and canoeing.
• Native landscaping and trees should be used in new development. Maximize the retention of native plant species when new development occurs.
• Require new development to remove invasive non-native plants.
• Protect and improve water quality in the Little Manatee River, its creeks and inlets.
• Support environmental education for homeowners, boaters and children.
• Create “Low Impact Development” (LID) principles to guide new growth, and protect the Little Manatee River, Marsh Creek, Tampa Bay and wetland areas.

Goal 4: Culture and History – Promote development that recognizes the historic character of the Ruskin community and enhances the quality of life.

Strategies:

• Promote the history and culture of Ruskin.
• Support development of a community center.
• Recognize the agrarian and commercial fishing past of the Ruskin
• Support continued agricultural and aquacultural activities.
• Promote a small town character.
• Support the Ruskin Tomato, and Seafood festivals, building on their themes for community identification.

Goal 5: Community and Neighborhood Character – Provide for a diversity of home styles and types while protecting Ruskin’s small town character.

Strategies:

• Eliminate the “flex” provisions within and into the Ruskin Community Plan area.
• Limit the height of new residential development to 50 feet, unless a more restrictive limitation exists.
• Implement the Characteristics of Livable Neighborhood Guidelines for future residential development within Ruskin to ensure an attractive community that balances new development with historic uses.
• Encourage development that is connected with, and integrated into, the Ruskin community. Design features (e.g. walls, gates) that isolate or segregate development from the community is inconsistent with the community’s character and should be discouraged.
• Developments should continue and/or replicate the traditional “grid” street pattern found in Ruskin to the greatest extent practicable.
• Support housing to accommodate a diverse population and income levels.
• Recognize the four distinct neighborhood areas depicted on the Ruskin Neighborhood Area Map. Each neighborhood has a unique character and associated development guidelines. The areas are listed below.
  ▪ Area 1 - Northwest Ruskin.
  ▪ Area 2 - Northeast Ruskin
  ▪ Area 3 - South Ruskin
  ▪ Area 4 - Rural Ruskin.
• Subdivisions and other development existing prior to this plan do not set precedents for future development that would be inconsistent with this community plan.
• Initiate and support community clean-up efforts.
• Promote beautification and landscaping along US 41, College Avenue and Shell Point Road
• Prohibit pole signs and limit ground signs to eight (8) feet in height.

Goal 6: Education - Provide quality education opportunities for Ruskin.

Strategies:
• Support the development of a community college.
• Secure future neighborhood school sites concurrent with the rezoning of property for homes.
  ▪ Elementary schools should be located internal to neighborhoods and should avoid locations along arterial streets.
• Every effort should be made to co-locate schools with park facilities.
• Require applicants of rezonings containing 50 or more residential units to consult with the Hillsborough County School District regarding potential school sites.

Goal 7: College Avenue – Ensure that development along College Avenue enhances the appearance of Ruskin, avoids strip commercial patterns, and is compatible with the revitalization of downtown Ruskin.

Strategies:
• Implement the College Avenue Retail Development Guidelines.
• Locate new uses along College Avenue in the following manner:
• Commercial, office and residential uses from the intersection of 21st Street and College Avenue to the eastern boundary of the Community Plan area.
• Office and professional services, and residential uses between 12th Street and 21st Street.
• Residential uses, including higher density housing will be encouraged between 12th Street and 3rd Street. Commercial and office uses should not be permitted.

• Establish a gateway to provide a sense of arrival.

Goal 8: Transportation – Ensure a balanced transportation system that reflects the community’s character and provides for options including walking, bicycling and transit.

Strategies:
• Support and implement the SouthShore Corridor Plan
• Ensure that roadways are designed to preserve the community character of Ruskin.
• Preserve and enhance the traditional “grid” pattern of roadways.
• Support implementation of the “Scenic Corridor” designation and design considerations for 19th Avenue N.E., S.R. 674 and roadways in the SouthShore Corridor Plan with the “Scenic Corridor” designation.
• 19th Avenue N.E. from U.S. 41 to U.S. 301 should not be designated as a truck route.
• Retain Shell Point Road as a 2-lane roadway, allowing only intersection and site-related improvements.
• Complete sidewalks along Shell Point Road West.
• Support mass transit opportunities.
• Expand and enhance opportunities for biking and walking.

Goal 9: Parks and open space - Provide adequate and quality recreational opportunities.

Strategies:
• Parks should be located within neighborhoods, preferably co-located with schools.
• Retain corridors for the Greenway and trail loop outlined on the Master Plan map.
• Provide for a park facility within Ruskin for league and organized sports.
• Ensure that E.G. Simmons Park continues to improve and remains a quality Bay access and water use resource.
• Enhance and expand Camp Bayou as a center for learning about nature, natural history and as a nature preserve for passive recreation.
• Support the purchase, or dedication, of additional land for parks.

Goal 10: Public Facilities and Services - Provide for appropriate facilities and services as the community grows.
**Strategies:**
- Support a new regional library for the South County area.
- Continue to provide library services in downtown Ruskin.
- Sheriff and Fire Services facilities should be located near US 41.
- Government services should be co-located within the downtown.
- Strengthen Code enforcement efforts in order to enhance community appearance.