

BOCC Citizen Input March 11, 2025

In February 2015, my friend Lisa Callea took me for the first time to see Chinsegut. From that day forward, I began volunteering to preserve and promote that property. In 2017, Lisa and I stood before the BOCC asking you to sign a 50 year lease with the State. We did that because we needed a longer lease in order to apply for grants and loans.

I stand before you 8 years later to ask you to table this item to terminate that 50 year lease until you have more information.

I became concerned in January when I showed up to volunteer to give tours of the home and saw piles of trees that had been cut down. I was in the middle of a tour when I directed the group to look at the 100 year old Mexican Lucky Nut Bush on the North Lawn. I turned around and saw it had been plowed down and all that remained was a pile of dirt.

The next day I started asking questions and found out the county had also budgeted \$250K for a parking lot. I next contacted Mr. Rogers. Every interaction I've ever had with him has been positive and I figured he'd be able to help me make sense of it. I asked that he have a meeting with the City of Brooksville and the Tampa Bay History Center to collectively decide what improvements needed to occur. He said that was a good idea but then I found out the permits had already been pulled and construction could start any day.

That's when I went public with my blog and notified the State of the unauthorized construction.

The County's lease with the State of Florida under clause #8 requires the County to submit a Land Use Plan to the State and get approval on it before developing or physically altering the site. I have done two public records requests and that document does not appear to exist.

The Land Use plan would have identified archeological areas that need to be protected. Even two years ago I would never have believed that the most significant archeological finds would occur in our parking lot! The proposed construction area should be similarly examined before it is covered in concrete.

Let me put this in layman's terms. If I rented a house, would I be able to decide I want to add a room to the house, call a contractor and pull a permit, listing myself as the owner? Of course not! But that is what happened here.

Clause 25 & 26 of the lease says that if the county builds without permission, you'd have 60 days to undo the damage. So you would have spent \$250K and then had to spend more money to tear it all up!

Mr. Hawkins said in an email that the construction area is not in the historic area. He is not correct. The National Register form, section 10, page 1 says the boundary includes a 14 acre section of the property. That is much larger than just the house or the front lawn.

I believe he is also incorrect in what he calls "Historic." The government definition of historic is anything 50 years or older. We have pictures of the dining hall going back to the 1960s. That makes it historic.

In my discussions with Mr. Rogers I offered to volunteer my services to write grants once the county, city, and History Center come to an agreement on a land use plan. I make that offer again. There are SO many grant opportunities for this land!

When he donated Chinsegut Sanctuary to the US government, Raymond quoted the scripture "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Table this.

Take time to cast your vision for this community before you vote to give up the most important asset this county has control of. We the people are counting on you to lead well.¹

¹ I was unable to say the last two sentences as the 3 minute time limit was up.