

From: Jon Jouben <JJouben@co.hernando.fl.us>
Sent: Monday, March 3, 2025 11:57:38 AM
To: John Allocco <JAllocco@co.hernando.fl.us>
Cc: Jeffrey Rogers <JRogers@co.hernando.fl.us>; Toni Brady <TBrady@co.hernando.fl.us>; Pamela Hare <phare@co.hernando.fl.us>; Lisa Morgan <LMorgan@co.hernando.fl.us>
Subject: Chinsegut Hill - Possible Early Termination (LR. 25-125)

Commissioner:

You have asked how Hernando County can terminate the Chinsegut Hill lease early. As explained below, the BOCC cannot unilaterally terminate the lease. Instead, BOCC will have to request that the Governor and the Cabinet, sitting as the lessor, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the State of Florida (the "Trustees"), vote to terminate the lease early.

The lease consists of two documents: (1) Lease Agreement #4715, dated May 28, 2013, and (2) "Amendment Number 1 to Lease Number 4715," dated November 29, 2017 (collectively, "Lease # 4715"). Lease #4715's current term will expire "on May 31, 2063, unless sooner terminated pursuant to the provisions of this lease." See Paragraph h 3 of the Lease # 4715, as it was amended by Paragraph 1 of the Amendment.

Paragraph 28 of Lease # 4715 contains the provisions governing the document's early termination. It states, in pertinent part, that "[i]n the event no further use of the leased premises or any part thereof is needed, [the County] shall give written notification to [the Trustees] and the Bureau of Public Land Administration, Division of State Lands, State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection, . . . at least six months prior to the release of any or all of the leased premises. Notification shall include a legal description, this lease number, and an explanation of the release. The release shall only be valid if approved by [the Trustees] through the execution of a release of lease instrument with the same formality as this lease."

Please note that the BOCC can ask the Trustees for a partial termination of Lease #4715. See *Id.* For example, the BOCC can ask the Trustees to let the County keep the historical site, but to take back the conference center. Please also note that if the Trustees terminate Lease #4715, the County's license agreements with the Tampa Bay Historical Society and the City of Brooksville. The County could also ask the Trustees for permission to assign Lease # 4715 to one or both of the County's licensees.

If this is something that you wish to pursue, I would recommend placing the potential termination of Lease # 4715, or a partial termination thereof, on a future BOCC agenda for discussion.

Highlighted copies of the pertinent documents are attached hereto for your review.

Jon Jouben, Esq.
County Attorney
Board Certified in City, County, and Local Government Law
Hernando County Attorney's Office



Amber LynnRN

Leave Chinsegut Hill Alone!

To: RAmsler@hernandocounty.us, BHawkins@co.hernando.fl.us, JAllocco@hernandocounty.us, JerryC@co.hernando.fl.us, SChampion@hernandocounty.us

March 6, 2025 at 6:45 PM



CAUTION: This email originated from outside the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to any plans that would change the management of and preservation of Chinsegut Hill Historic Site/ Chinsegut Hill Retreat and Conference Center. This property is an irreplaceable part of our county's history, and any attempt to change its purpose would be an outright betrayal of the community that values and cherishes it. This site holds immense historical, environmental, and cultural significance for our community, and any changes that compromise its integrity would be a great loss. I am extremely disappointed that our elected officials are trying, once again, to change Hernando County in ways that the citizens don't want. I have lived in Hernando County for over 30 years and I would hate to see another historical property be lost to greed, neglect or in the name of "growth".

Chinsegut Hill is not just a landmark; it is a connection to our past, a space for education, and a cherished part of our county's heritage. I urge you to consider the long-term value of maintaining and protecting this treasure for future generations rather than pursuing changes that could diminish its historical and natural beauty. The property is on the National Historic Registry and changes made to it should not be made quickly, flippantly or because of pressure from those who don't have the best interests of the site in mind.

So many changes have been made to Hernando County recently and many of them have not been positive. Chinsegut Hill is not just another piece of land—it is a historic and cultural landmark that must be protected, not exploited. Countless residents and historians have worked tirelessly to preserve this site, and it is your responsibility as elected officials to honor that legacy, not erase it.

Please prioritize the preservation of Chinsegut Hill and ensure it remains a place of learning, reflection, and community engagement. Let me be clear: The people of this county do not want Chinsegut Hill touched. We expect our leaders to act in the best interest of the community, not special interests, financial gain or short-sighted plans that will forever damage this treasure. I urge you to abandon any efforts that would compromise Chinsegut Hill's historical significance.

Preserve it, protect it, and leave it alone.

Amber Lamoreaux

Dear Chairperson Hawkins and Members of the Board,

I am writing to advocate for the continuation of Hernando County's state lease for the historic Chinsegut Hill property. While I understand the Board's concerns regarding the financial implications for taxpayers, I believe that with strategic planning, Chinsegut Hill can become a self-sustaining asset that enriches our community both culturally and fiscally.

Transforming Chinsegut Hill into a space that is as accessible and as utilized as our county parks can significantly increase public engagement and revenue. By continually developing the property to accommodate activities such as guided tours, educational programs, community events, and recreational opportunities like hiking and bird-watching, we can attract a diverse group of visitors. The Chinsegut Hill Retreat and Conference Center currently offers lodging and event spaces, indicating existing infrastructure that can be further leveraged to serve the community.

A prudent approach involves comparing the annual expenditures of Chinsegut Hill with those of other parks in Hernando County. For instance, in the third quarter of fiscal year 2022, the Parks and Recreation Department experienced increased expenditures due to various repair and maintenance costs, including resurfacing of tennis courts and parking lots. Additionally, there was a land purchase for \$785,000 to provide parking access to the Weeki Wachee Preserve. Which some of you have called "just an old rock mine". This is far from a historic property yet funding and development is moving forward.

What does it cost to improve and maintain The Lake-house, Boat Ramp, Stewy's Skate Park, and other parks? Is the cost for this historical property much more of a burden?

Since 2016, Hernando County has allocated approximately \$125,000 in grants, tourist development funds, maintenance work, and other services to Chinsegut Hill. This historical investment is relatively modest compared to other county expenditures and underscores the potential for Chinsegut Hill to operate efficiently with proper management and community involvement.

It is imperative that any development plans for Chinsegut Hill prioritize the preservation of its natural beauty, including native plants and trees. This approach not only maintains the ecological integrity of the property but also enhances its appeal as a serene retreat for visitors.

Regarding compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it is important to note that while accessibility is crucial, certain exemptions exist for historic properties where modifications would threaten or destroy the historical significance of the property. Therefore, any accessibility projects should have been carefully evaluated to balance legal compliance, historical preservation, and fiscal responsibility. I don't believe some of your past votes reflected this knowledge and thus the advancement of the parking lot and bathroom expenditures in question with this agenda item. A local volunteer committee who could oversee and give guidance of the needs at the site could be a great way to engage the community and help raise funds. Myself and other advocates for this property would be happy to sit on such a committee.

By maintaining the state lease and implementing a strategic plan that enhances public accessibility, preserves natural beauty, and exercises fiscal prudence, Chinsegut Hill can evolve into a cherished community asset. You would show the community you are willing to govern proactively instead of reactively. If the state lease is abandoned because the conversation got heated online regarding expenditures that some felt were excessive, it would appear you are just unwilling to be held accountable for the tough decisions.


As you are aware an abandonment of the state lease could result in it being turned over to another entity that would close access for our tax payers. I know you all don't want less park access for the community. The state could also decide to sell the property at auction with the same outcome of lost history and accessibility.

I respectfully urge the Board to consider these factors and continue its commitment to preserving our county's historical and cultural heritage. You have an opportunity to protect your county's history by devising a plan to be both fiscally responsible and morally accountable to our long time citizens wants and needs. A growing community doesn't have to be at a cost to the protection of our dearest assets and identity.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedicated service to Hernando County.

Sincerely,

April Johnson-Spence
Hernando County Voter and Tax Payer for over 20 years.

 **John Allocco**
Re: Chinsegut Hill Lease Termination
To: Axl David

March 10, 2025 at 3:52 PM

Received and read.

Respectfully,

John Allocco
District 3
Hernando County Board of Commissioners

From: Axl David <axl@axldavid.com>
Sent: Monday, March 10, 2025 3:12:00 PM
To: John Allocco <JAllocco@co.hernando.fl.us>
Subject: Chinsegut Hill Lease Termination

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Commissioner Allocco,

I'm writing to express my **agreement** with your agenda item to consider terminating the county's Chinsegut Hill lease with the State of Florida.

It seems some residents want to take a scalpel to this issue when a sledgehammer is needed.

Thanks for taking the initiative and I pray the other commissioners are in agreement.

-Axl

To: JAllocco@hernandocounty.us, JerryC@co.hernando.fl.us, RAmsler@hernandocounty.us, BHawkins@co.hernando.fl.us, jrogers@hernandocounty.us, SChampion@hernandocounty.us

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Hernando County Board of County Commissioners
20 N. Main Street, Room 263
Brooksville, FL 34601

Subject: Advocacy for the continuation and enhancement of the state lease of Chinsegut Hill

Dear Chairperson Hawkins and Members of the Board,

I am writing in opposition of discontinuing the preservation of the historic Chinsegut Hill Retreat and Conservation Center.

Chinsegut has a special place in my heart. I know I am not alone in this. From friend's weddings to nature walks to family photo shoots, the beauty it has added to my life is unprecedented and, prayerfully, not at its end.

The continuation of enjoying this land has been passed on to my three young children over the last few years as they each enter into elementary school age and engage with the world around them more and more. I believe experiencing history by standing right smack in the middle of it is the best way to absorb it.

We are members of Home Circle of Hernando, a home schooling support group. Chinsegut has been so gracious over the years with coordinating and leading home school educational events that we have enjoyed participating in as well as hosting our Home Circle Nature Craft Class on the property. This 2024/2025 school year we are studying endangered and threatened species of Florida.

Amidst the gopher tortoise, key deer, burrowing owl and more, one species we learned about was the Brooksville Bellflower. The Brooksville Bellflower was first collected by John Kunkel Smail and Mrs. Raymond Robins in 1924 from the grassy slopes of Chinsegut Hill, on the Robins estate. It only grows right here in Hernando and Hillsborough county.

Holding tight to the past is an important part of a civilization's journey forward, this our race knows as true. We as a community are begging our leaders to prioritize history and nature, choose sacrifice over monetary gain and do the hard work it takes to preserve and cherish this land.

The retreat and conference center of Chinsegut could be used more to its full potential and bring in fantastic revenue by hosting festivals and private events. With some attention, planning and processing put into it, this place it could thrive as a hub for our community!

My family and friends hope you will consider treating the Chinsegut Retreat and Conservation Center with the care and concern it deserves. I have learned a lot about Brooksville through avenues involving Chinsegut such as the Elizabeth Robins Podcast and would love for these historical avenues in my family's lives to continue.

Sincerely,

Audra Thomason
Hernando County voter and tax-payer

C Kelly
Re: Chinsegut Hill funding
To: Jeffrey Rogers, jallocco@hernandocounty.us

March 11, 2025 at 7:56 AM

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Further information and discussion is needed. I've attached some additional information since you've responded to some of my questions. Below, is my stance at this time and ask this to be shared with the board

Urgent!!!! On today's BOCC agenda is an item to abandon the state lease for Chinsegut Hill Retreat and Conference Center. This is one of Hernando County's most historic sites and some of our commissioners don't think it is worth preserving for future generations. Some local residents have been upset that They approved almost \$300k expenditures for parking and bathrooms(that were not needed) just a short time ago. In response all of a sudden John Allocco had proposed to get rid of the property? Why so reactionary with our history? What's really happening here? Cutting waste doesn't mean abandoning our history and paving over it! Please consider showing up today or writing your commissioners to tell them to table discussions so the community has time to way in on this very important issue and possibly workshop it for along with the strategic park plan. It could be more accessible to the public like all our parks. If the county terminates the lease for the property it could be closed to the public forever. The citizens will have no control who runs it and it could be out of the sunshine laws. Please help if you understand the importance of preserving our county history.

On Sun, Mar 2, 2025 at 10:05 PM Jeffrey Rogers <J.Rogers@co.hernando.fl.us> wrote:
Good evening.

The retreat center is now operated by the City of Brooksville. I believe they rent it out for weddings, events, meetings, special occasions.

I do not believe it is used for students or archeological digs. However, that should be confirmed with the City of Brooksville.

Jeffrey Rogers, P.E.
County Administrator
[Hernando County](#)
[15470 Flight Path Drive](#)
[Brooksville, FL 34604](#)
(352)754-4841
jrogers@hernandocounty.us

Sign up to receive the [Hernando Highlights](#) monthly newsletter!

L LOUIS
Chinsegut Hill
To: JAllocco@hernandocounty.us

MARCH 10, 2025 AT 7:10 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Thanks for proposing to terminate the wasteful spending chinese gut hill is. Also thanks for blocking me.
- LJ



AM Ashley Markford
Preservation of Chinsegut Hill – A Vital Resource for Our Community
To: BHawkins@co.hernando.fl.us, RAmsler@hernandocounty.us, JAllocco@hernandocounty.us, JerryC@co.hernando.fl.us, SChampion@hernandocounty.us

March 10, 2025 at 12:19 PM

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Dear Chairperson Hawkins and Members of the Board,

I am writing to express my strong support for the continuation of Hernando County's state lease for the historic Chinsegut Hill property. While I understand the Board's concerns regarding the financial responsibilities associated with the lease, I firmly believe that, with strategic planning and community engagement, Chinsegut Hill has the potential to become a self-sustaining asset that benefits Hernando County both culturally and economically.

As a homeschooling family, Chinsegut Hill has been an invaluable resource for hands-on learning, offering a unique opportunity to immerse students in the rich history of our county. The property serves as an outdoor classroom, bringing history to life in a way that textbooks cannot. The historic manor and surrounding grounds provide a tangible connection to Florida's past, allowing students to engage in meaningful educational experiences, historical reenactments, nature studies, and community events.

Losing public access to Chinsegut Hill—or worse, seeing it sold to private interests—would be a devastating loss to the homeschool community and to Hernando County as a whole. Many families, educators, and organizations rely on this historic site to provide affordable, quality educational programming. Beyond homeschooling, Chinsegut Hill attracts visitors, historians, and researchers, contributing to heritage tourism and local economic activity.

I urge the Board to consider alternative solutions that would allow the county to preserve this historic landmark while ensuring its financial viability. Through public-private partnerships, increased community involvement, and innovative programming, Chinsegut Hill can continue to serve as an educational and cultural cornerstone for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your dedication to our county's future and respectfully request that you prioritize the preservation of this important historical and educational resource.

Sincerely,
Ashley Markford
(352) 398-2338

3/11/2025

Hernando County Board of County Commissioners
20 N. Main Street, Room 263
Brooksville, FL 34601

Subject: Advocacy for the Continuation and Enhancement of the State Lease for Chinsegut Hill

Dear Chairperson Hawkins and Members of the Board,

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I respectfully urge the Board to consider these factors and continue its commitment to preserving our county's historical and cultural heritage. You have an opportunity to protect your county's history by devising a plan to be both fiscally responsible and morally accountable to our long time citizens wants and needs. A growing community doesn't have to be at a cost to the protection of our dearest assets and identity.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your dedicated service to Hernando County.

Sincerely,

Marlana McTague