

America in Bloom 2016 EVALUATION REPORT

Community: Venice, Florida

Population Category: 20,000 – 30,000

Evaluation Dates: April 28-29, 2016

Judges: Alex Pearl & Tony Ferrara



America in Bloom envisions communities across the country as welcoming and vibrant places to live, work, and play – benefitting from colorful plants and trees; enjoying clean environments; celebrating heritage; and planting pride through volunteerism.

All evaluation criteria are adjusted to the climate and environmental conditions of the community's location.

This Evaluation Report is based upon your community's efforts in each of the following criteria:

Criteria	Possible Points	Actual Points
1. Floral Displays	175.00	143.00
2. Landscaped Areas	175.00	149.00
3. Urban Forestry	175.00	143.00
4. Environmental Efforts	175.00	145.00
5. Heritage Preservation	175.00	148.00
6. Overall Impression	125.00	101.00
Total	1000	829.00
%	0.82900	
Bloom Rating	4 blooms	

Five blooms = 85% Four blooms = 72.50–84.95% Three blooms = 60.00–72.45% Two blooms = 45.00–59.95% One bloom = <45.00%

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General Observations and Recommendations:

Recommendations are indicated in italics.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the City of Venice for their hospitality and attentiveness. Virtually everywhere we traveled through Venice, we were greeted by warm and friendly people. The enthusiasm, team-spirit, and “can do” attitude of the many volunteer organizations in Venice is remarkable. It is indeed a model for other cities to emulate.

Each year different judging teams view the accomplishments of participating cities to determine their progress toward achievements of the criteria in each AIB category. Judges make determinations based on their interpretation of each city’s potential for further progress in each of the evaluated categories. Judges may also weigh the category criteria differently. As such, there should not be a cause for alarm if scores or bloom ratings are lower than the prior year. It should be noted that the same interpretive scoring method will be applied consistently during the judging cycle to other cities in the same population category.

Prior to our visit, we reviewed the city’s strategic plan. Goal One of the plan is “To Keep Venice Beautiful and Eco-Friendly.” It is evident that both the city and its host of volunteer organizations have worked very hard to ensure that this important goal is achieved and maintained. We were pleased to see the extraordinary level of cooperation and coordination between the Venice Area Beautification Inc. (VABI), the Main Street organization, Gulf Coast Community Foundation, and the City of Venice. So many wonderful achievements have resulted from these and many other relationships.

It is important for the city to take note of the volunteer hours put forth by the many organizations serving the Venice area. We were provided with a short list of approximately 21 different volunteer groups in and around the City of Venice. Together, they have contributed over 500,000 volunteer hours. The Internal Revenue Service provides established guidelines for converting volunteer hours to dollar value. Applying these guidelines, volunteer hours total over \$11 million dollars in labor savings devoted to improving the overall appearance and quality of life in Venice. Tracking these contributions is critical to obtaining grants and other outside funding that might require a soft match in the form of labor and materials.

We recommend setting up a program to track volunteer time dedicated to the city. It might be beneficial for this program to reside in the Personnel or Administrative Services Department. It could be staffed with volunteers working in conjunction with city staff. We also recommend an interactive feature on the city’s website that promotes volunteerism and lists the different organizations where volunteers are needed. The program could be promoted as Volunteer Venice!

Prior to our arrival, we were provided with an impressive list of accomplishments that resulted from recommendations from previous AIB evaluations. It is a testament to the value that Venice places on the America in Bloom experience. We were particularly impressed with the new monument signs and wayfinding signage mentioned later in this report. Both were outcomes of recommendations made by previous judging teams. We were delighted to be formally greeted by the electronic message board integrated into the monument sign at the Venice Avenue entrance to the downtown core.

The City of Venice and Sarasota County continue to engage in a cooperative relationship. This is manifested in a number of successful projects of mutual benefit related to right of ways, road improvements, and environmental projects.

Once again, our sincere thanks to Bob Vedder, Phil Ellis, and John Veneziano who were our hosts throughout our tour. We also recognize Mayor John Holic and City Manager Ed Lavallee for taking time from their busy schedules to enlighten us. They and the many other individuals we met in our short time in Venice were passionate cheerleaders for the city. Venice is indeed an America in Bloom success story.

Congratulations to Venice, Florida! We look forward to your participation next year.

1. Floral Displays

Flower beds, containers, planters, baskets, window boxes, trellises. Arrangement, originality, distribution, location, diversity, balance, harmony, quality of maintenance. Use and integration of annuals, perennials, ornamental grasses, bulbs, tropical plants, and seasonal flowers and colorful foliage that provide year-round interest.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Leadership and plan of action for floral displays	20	15
Concept and design, variety of plantings, overall effect	20	16
Maintenance and quality of displays	20	16
Design for all seasons	15	12
Business		
Concept and design, overall effect	15	12
Maintenance and quality of displays	15	12
Residential		
Concept and design, overall effect	15	13
Maintenance and quality of displays	15	13
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in design, planting, and maintenance of floral displays	20	17
Financial and in-kind contributions to floral displays	20	17
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	143.00

Observations and Recommendations:

The city of Venice and Venice Area Beautification (VABI) have planned and implemented a hanging basket program focused around the Centennial Park Main Street business district. Great effort goes into the daily care of the 41 hanging baskets and many other floral vessels in Venice's downtown core.

Although they can be very attractive when first planted, hanging baskets require special care and maintenance if they are to retain their visual appeal as well as ensuring that plants remain healthy and vibrant. *We suggest creating an ongoing training program for new and existing (volunteer) workers. Consider attending some of the instructional seminars at Disney, or other theme parks. We also recommend obtaining related information from the Florida Nursery Growers Landscape Association flower trials (www.fnqla.org) on the selection of plant cultivars, as well as care and maintenance for creating lush baskets that will warrant a "wow!"*

We noted the window box planters on the fencing at the Daiquiri Deck Raw Bar restaurant were attractively planted with annuals. *We recommend encouraging other restaurants with outdoor eating areas to incorporate lush window boxes or other appropriately planted containers in and around their outdoor eating spaces. We also recommend assisting restaurants and other businesses with suggestions on seasonal floral change-outs.*



During our tour, we noticed that many residents and numerous business owners had attractive floral arrangements on display. *We recommend enlisting support from the horticultural businesses in Venice and establishing community flower trial gardens on an individual site or multiple sites, for those ornamental plants that will thrive and display well in Gulf Coast climate conditions. We also suggest planning and holding an annual floral festival. Homeowners could showcase specific plants and agree to host visitors during the festival.*



We applaud VABI for their creativity in obtaining several old fountains that were no longer serviceable. The fountains were repurposed as planters and positioned pleasingly in the downtown business district. *We recommend using these fountains and other vessels to display seasonal and holiday planting themes. Consider sponsoring a Thanksgiving or Christmas adopt a planter contest for the most attractive and creative themed floral display.*

The City of Venice, VABI, and the Venice Main Street organization should be proud of their combined efforts to make the downtown business district come alive with color from the many floral displays. However, we noted that some of the outlying commercial centers were not as well adorned. *We recommend investigating ways to extend the floral efforts from the downtown business district to*

outlying commercial centers.

During our tour of the downtown business district, we noticed several small alcoves and pedestrian pass-throughs off of the main sidewalk areas. Walkways extended between buildings along Venice Avenue, exposing bare brick walls to pedestrians. Bare walls are opportunities for vertical flower gardens.

These gardens can be designed to fit in both small and larger walled areas. Many come with built in irrigation systems that require a water supply. While others can be planted with succulents or other drought tolerant plants that require little or no watering. *We recommend developing a "Vertical Floral Display Plan" for the downtown business district. We also recommend seeking out other plant societies with chapters in the Venice area that might assist with the care and maintenance of city-wide floral displays. A few suggested organizations are the Native Plant Society, Palm & Cycad Society, Tropical Flowering Tree Society, The American Bamboo Society and the Herb Society.*



2. Landscaped Areas

Overall design and suitability of landscape, turf, and ground covers. Use of native and introduced plants. Good use of design principles (i.e., balance of plant material and constructed elements, harmony, color, texture, shape, focal points, etc.). Sustainability. Integration of lighting, hardscapes, and site elements such as lamp posts, water features, drinking fountains, bicycle racks, benches, trash/recycling receptacles, etc. Maintenance (weeds, mulching practices, edging). Site rejuvenation and rehabilitation. Efforts in strategic planning. Community gardens, children's gardens, healing gardens, pollinator gardens, Backyard Wildlife Habitat, Audubon, and other specialty public gardens and zoos.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall design and planting of landscape, turf and groundcovers	15	13
Environmental management of sports fields and turf	15	12
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	13
Sustainable management, naturalization and eco-design	15	13
Business		
Overall design and planting of landscape	15	13
Management of turf and groundcovers	10	8
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	13
Residential		
Overall design and planting of landscape	15	13
Management of turf and groundcovers	15	12
Quality of landscape maintenance	15	13
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement, i.e. garden clubs, neighborhood groups, Master Gardeners and University extension, in funding, planting, and maintenance of landscaped areas	15	13
Participation in future planning (committees, councils, and advisory boards.)	15	13
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	149.00

Observations and Recommendations:

We commend Venice for implementing new landscaping strategies and maintenance projects consistent with, and in response to, prior recommendations from AIB evaluations. We were informed of the inter-local agreement between Sarasota County and the City of Venice which includes maintenance of the sports fields at Wellfield and Chuck Reiter parks.



As we toured the sports parks, we noted the need for more attention to the landscaping around the entrances as well as the backstops, bleachers, and dugout areas. We observed the pathways throughout several of the parks also in need of additional landscaping maintenance. *We recommend that the City of Venice revisit the maintenance agreement with Sarasota County for the sports fields as well as other parks that the County maintains.*

We suggest additional language in the agreement that specifies the maintenance of both the planted landscapes as well as complimenting hardscapes such as sidewalks, picnic areas, fencing, playground equipment, and other visual features that are in need of attention. Consider painting some of the wooden backstop areas, adding additional landscaped borders to park entrances as well as areas inside the parks.

Consider determining a way to place dumpsters and trash receptacles so that they do not face the entry drives and parking areas. Dumpster enclosures would be a preferred solution. Parks and other recreational facilities located in the City of Venice are assumed to be owned and operated by the city. The majority of people who visit these facilities are likely to be unaware of the agreement in place with Sarasota County. As such, the image of a sports park in need of maintenance will reflect on the City of Venice. We are well aware of the fiscal challenges that cities and counties face. It is often difficult to provide the essential services to the public and also ensure sufficient funding for recreational improvements.



It should be noted that many of the professional sports teams offer funding for local ball field renovation to encourage the youth in communities to become active in sports programs. Visit Florida.com is also a potential source of grant funding. *We recommend that the City of Venice and Sarasota County research grant funding opportunities for*

the renovation of local ball fields, to include focusing on aesthetics (landscaping and hardscapes). The Gulf Coast Community Foundation may also be a potential funding source.

Many of Venice's volunteer organizations are actively involved in beautification projects throughout the city. *We suggest that the City of Venice Public Works Department acquire the services of a landscape architect to develop a park renovation plan for John Nolan Park. As a cost-saving measure, we recommend the use of volunteers and volunteer organizations for both labor and donated materials. We also suggest an active role for VABI in organizing community fundraisers to support this effort.*

Congratulations to Venice's business community for taking pride in their landscaped areas. The Inn at the Beach (pictured at right), is a wonderful example of how native plants and trees can blend with pleasing hardscape and signage to create a beautiful and welcoming landscaped environment. We noted in the city's community profile, that the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce and the Venice Sun Gondolier, in response to a previous suggestion from the 2014 AIB evaluation, sponsored a beautification contest for homeowners. *We recommend that this program be conducted each year with multiple awards and recognition given to businesses as well as homeowners. We also suggest a special recognition for the Inn at the Beach.*



Perhaps the Chamber can create a Beautification Award sign that can be displayed at the Inn, as well as at other business locations that have demonstrated landscaping excellence.

Venice homeowners clearly take pride in their residential landscaping. We were very impressed with the attention given to front yards in many of Venice's neighborhoods.



We noted that many of the residences were cared for by professional landscaping companies. However, there were other neighborhoods where residents were observed working in their own yards caring for lawns, gardens, and planted areas. *As mentioned previously, it is so important for the city to recognize these efforts as a way to motivate more homeowners, city-wide.*



We did not observe any community gardens during our tour. We understand that the Church of Latter Day Saints recently established a community garden on their property, but it is unknown if plots are available to the general public or only to church members. We did observe two butterfly gardens; one located inside the Blalock Park Arboretum (pictured at left), and the other at the Venice Museum and Archives which is maintained by a local Girl Scout troop. *We recommend expanding Venice's overall community gardening program with special emphasis on establishing additional butterfly and pollinator gardens. Community vegetable gardens could be incorporated into some of Venice's many parks. We*

suggest coordinating this program with Sarasota County and consideration be given to including community gardens in future park renovation plans. We also suggest contacting the Sarasota County Butterfly Club (www.sarasotabutterfly.com) which is the local chapter of the National Butterfly Association (NABA), for additional information and guidance on plant selection as well as the various species of Florida butterflies that can be bred.

Pollinator gardens are easily established. Local nurseries and libraries have easy-to-follow guide books that illustrate plant species that provide beautiful color in a mixed landscaped setting, and also attract pollinators.

3. Urban Forestry

Distribution, variety and suitability of trees; new plantings; urban tree program; qualified personnel or access to trained individual(s); inventory or database; frequency of tree surveys; care and maintenance programs; preservation of heritage trees and woodlots and green buffer zones; scheduled succession plantings, Tree City USA and their Growth Award. Efforts in management, planning, maintenance, improvement, and innovation. Written policies, bylaws and regulations, long- and short-term plans, trees on private property protected.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall plan of action, tree planting programs, variety of species, inventory	20	16
Tree maintenance	15	12
Preservation and restoration of natural areas	15	12
Tree protection/planting regulations and by-laws	15	13
Business		
Overall planting program	20	16
Tree maintenance	15	12
Residential		
Overall planting program	20	16
Tree maintenance	15	12
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in funding, planting, and maintenance of trees (i.e. Tree City USA)	20	17
Volunteer involvement of youth in tree programs (i.e., Arbor Day, etc.)	20	17
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	143.00

Observations and Recommendations:

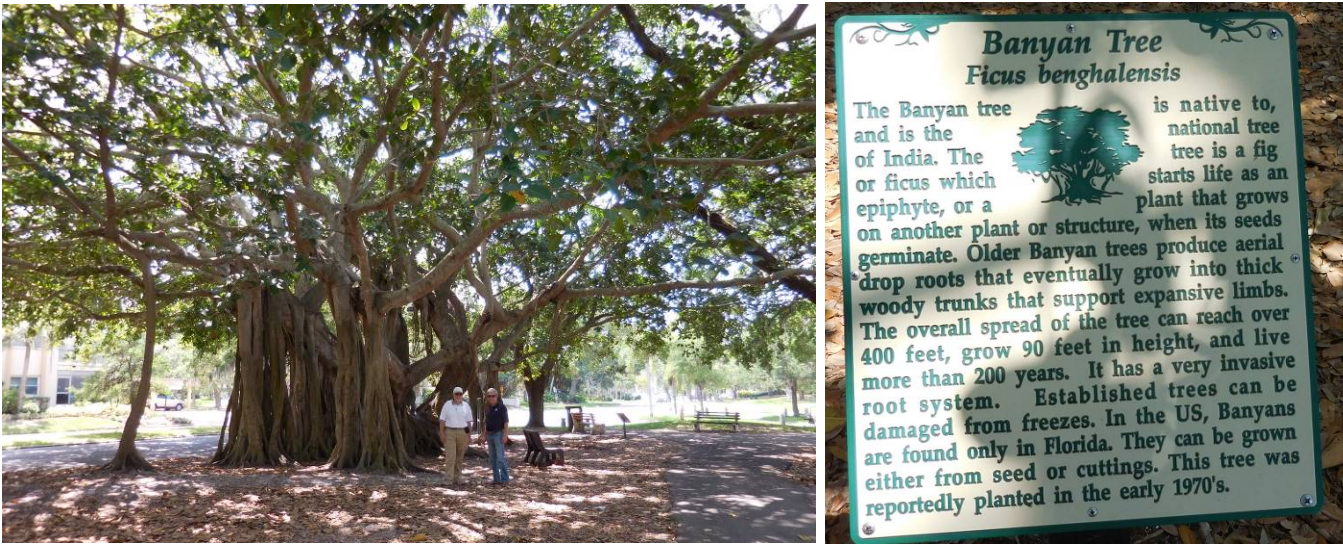
Venice has launched a very comprehensive urban forestry program. A number of objectives in their plans for the future will require a continued focus and commitment in order for them to be achieved. Venice first received their Tree City USA designation in 2011, and has been a recipient of this award each year for the past 4 years.



We were informed that a city-wide tree inventory program is currently in the early stages of implementation. *We encourage Venice to continue its efforts to complete their tree inventory and then apply for the Tree City USA Growth Award through the National Arbor Foundation, being mindful of the fact that the inventory is only one of several award criteria. There are approximately 13 other criteria that should be considered before applying for the Growth Award.*

It is important for Venice to also focus on a formal Heritage Tree or Landmark Tree program. During our tour we observed many large Live Oak trees around Heritage Park. There were several other locations around the city where beautiful majestic trees were planted. *We suggest a look through the city's archives for early photos of Venice, perhaps during the John Nolan era, and taking note of the trees that were located throughout the city and still remain today. If some of the descendants from the founding families are still residing in Venice, they may well have historic trees on their property. In addition to*

an inventory, we also recommend a care and maintenance program which would include a detailed inspection by a certified arborist. Once identified, we encourage the development of an informative brochure and a tour map that informs residents and visitors to Venice where to observe and enjoy these stately trees.



Pictured above is a majestic Banyan Tree in Venice's Heritage Park. At the base of the tree is a story board that provides general information specific to the Banyan species; however, there is little information about this particular tree. *To the extent that research information is available, we recommend story boards for landmark trees that provide specific information relative to the tree's historical significance. Additional information regarding heritage tree programs can be obtained by visiting American Forests at (www.americanforests.org)*



West Blalock Park has been designated as the Monty Andrews Arboretum. Trees at this location are planted along pedestrian pathways and identified with informative signage. During our tour we observed many volunteers working energetically to care for the many trees at this location. *We suggest determining if the Monty Andrews Arboretum can qualify as a Certified Arboretum through the Arbnnet Arboretum Certification Program. More information about the program can be obtained at www.arbnet.org.*

Our tour of Patriot's Park was a very moving experience. The park was created by the Leadership Sarasota



County Class of 2002 to commemorate those who perished on 9/11, as well as the heroes who saved other lives that day. The park also honors all members of our military who served in all wars, and have made sacrifices to preserve our freedom. *We encourage the City of Venice to become familiar with, and perhaps adopt a variation of the Canadian tree planting program called "Highway for Heroes." This is a program that plants trees as a living tribute to those who served their country. We encourage Venice to look at ways in which this program might further enhance Patriot's Park. More information can be obtained by visiting ([http://hohtribute.ca/about-](http://hohtribute.ca/about-hoh/mission/#sthash.aR5RRl3A.dpuf)*

[hoh/mission/#sthash.aR5RRl3A.dpuf](http://hohtribute.ca/about-hoh/mission/#sthash.aR5RRl3A.dpuf))

We applaud the hard work and dedication put forth by VABI. Working in conjunction with the City of Venice and Sarasota County, plans are developing to create a Memorial Urban Forest along the Venetian Waterway Trail. Hundreds of trees will ultimately be planted along the eastern side of the Intracoastal Waterway.

The City of Venice is preparing to replace all of the Sabal and Cabbage Palm trees in the downtown area due to a disease that has infested most of these trees. *We suggest a very thorough public education program to inform the public of the removal and replacement program. We recommend enlisting the support of the media, the Main Street Association as well as the Chamber of Commerce to ensure the information is disseminated throughout the community.*

4. Environmental Efforts

Sustainability practices. Recycling (paper, glass, metal, plastic, electronics, clothing, etc.), transfer/recycle stations, policies and by-laws, sustainable development strategies, waste reduction, hazardous waste minimization and collection (oil, paint, chemicals, used batteries, etc.), water quality and conservation, energy conservation, environmental cleanup activities, reducing carbon footprint, environmentally friendly transportation, LEED certification, air, noise and light pollution, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), rain gardens and rain barrels, composting, energy efficiency, youth programs, etc. Events such as Earth Day, Recycling Days, Bike to Work Days, etc.	Max Points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Leadership in environmental initiatives	25	22
Effective communication of environmental strategies and initiatives	25	22
New programs, improvement and innovation	25	22
Business		
Participation in environmental efforts	20	15
New programs, improvement and innovation	10	7
Residential		
Participation in environmental efforts	20	16
New programs, improvement and innovation	10	7
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in environmental efforts	20	17
Youth participation in environmental activities	20	17
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	145.00

Observations and Recommendations:

The City of Venice shares many of the environmental initiatives promoted and sponsored by Sarasota County. However, several local environmental projects have been undertaken by the city. In response to EPA mandates, Venice has implemented strict storm-water runoff programs to reduce the amount of surface water intrusion into the Gulf as well as inter-coastal water ways. Venice's Clean Beach program has resulted in zero beach advisories over the past 12 months. Venice has also invested more than \$50,000 for storm water pond clean-up projects. It should be noted that no state or federal funding was available for storm water



mitigation. The City of Venice determined that the projects would be prioritized and funded locally to ensure that the beach environment remains safe for both tourists and residents. Venice's most noteworthy environmental effort in 2015 was the Hatchett Creek Restoration Project. This project transformed a former 10 acre cement plant into what is now Legacy Park. The project involved the demolition of the plant buildings and the removal of over 6,000 tons of concrete material from along the creek bed. The concrete was crushed and recycled into road base material for use on other road construction projects. Invasive mangrove trimming occurred as well, allowing for wildlife observation points as well as a launching ramp for

kayaks and canoes.

Other debris and trash was removed from the creek resulting in a significant improvement to water quality.

Venice's most formidable environmental challenge continues to be the development of a broader, more comprehensive recycling program. The State of Florida has established a state-wide diversion rate goal of 75% for cities and counties. However, it has become apparent that Sarasota County as well as the cities it serves do not have facilities or resources in place to ensure this goal will be reached by the year 2020. It is important to note that the recommendations that follow are co-dependent elements of a comprehensive recycling program that should be viewed as mid-range multi-year goals for both the City of Venice and Sarasota County.

We were not able to determine if there was a process in place to measure or track diversion rates for individual cities within Sarasota County. As such, there appeared to be no way of knowing if individual city or community recycling programs were optimally effective. *We recommend that the City of Venice encourage a county-wide effort, in conjunction with Sarasota County and other communities, to put in place a method of tracking (by zip code) the diversion rates for each political sub-division, to include the County unincorporated area.* Also, the City of Venice has no standardization for residential curbside bins.

We observed many different forms of trash and recycle containers at the curb. Some were overflowing and their contents were spilling out onto parkways. Open paper bins are vulnerable to high winds and rain. Wet paper cannot be recycled. If paper becomes saturated it must then be placed in the general waste stream. There is also a disincentive to recycle when small bins are filled to overflowing. Residents tend to place recycled items in their trash bins.



The City of Venice issues residents two red 14 gallon plastic containers and charges a monthly fee for them. The first bin is for paper and the second, for a mix of plastic, glass, and aluminum cans. Cardboard is collected separately in bundles and residents are left to their own discretion regarding the packaging of additional recycled materials. Yard waste is also collected in various containers along with loose bundles. Once again, these methods are vulnerable to wind and rain. Empty yard bags can also create an unwanted nuisance if left at the curb. If taken, they must be properly disposed of at the composting facility.

We recommend implementing a single stream recycling program that allows residents to place cans, bottles, heavy plastic containers, and clean paper into one enclosed recycling bin. We further recommend that new and larger recycling bins be made available to residents at no cost. The bins pictured at the right allow for a more practical and effective recycling program. Covered bins provide protection from wind and rain thus preserving the viability of recycled paper, cardboard and other materials. They also ensure that lighter materials are not blown about streets and sidewalks. The green bin is for yard waste. Grass trimmings, leaves, smaller tree branches and bush trimmings can be collected, composted and made available to both residents and businesses. The brown bin is for trash and the blue bin is for single stream recycling.



Note that both blue and brown bins are generally available in both 32 gallon and 64 gallon sizes. *We recommend that the City of Venice encourage residents to obtain blue and brown bins that have the same capacity, thus providing an incentive to intensify their home recycling practices.*

We realize that budgets are a concern when implementing new, or expanding existing programs. It will require a capital investment to provide bins and also to retrofit waste trucks. It would also require three different pickups to ensure that materials remain separated throughout the process. However, cost recovery can begin immediately with these initial steps. First, with the diversity of containers currently left at curbside, it is assumed that at least two persons are required to operate a waste truck on pick up days.



With a single arm bin retrieval system, one operator can move quickly down neighborhood streets without leaving the cab of the truck; thus saving personnel costs as well as fuel costs associated with excessive idling. Second, with standard containers of sufficient size, pick up for trash, mixed recyclables, and yard waste can occur once a week instead of twice a week for trash. Larger yard waste bins may also reduce the number of special pickup requests. Lastly, and perhaps most important; City of Venice trucks that dump at the County landfill

can weigh all materials separately upon entry. With the proper program in place at the scales, each zip code in Sarasota County can track their individual diversion rate. This will assist in determining whether local programs are effective or if more public education is required.

Overall, we commend Venice for their efforts to promote both water and energy conservation. We were very pleased to observe the use of drought resistant plants and low-volume irrigation systems.

Venice has also installed LED and solar lighting in and around parks and other city facilities and has placed EV Charging Stations in a few places around the city. *We recommend expanding the number of EV Charging Stations in parking lots where feasible throughout the city.*

We reviewed the City of Venice Wastewater Master Plan (2012), to include the CIP (Capital Improvement Projects) list. We were unable to determine if the treatment plant has a methane recovery system. Methane can be converted into electrical generation that could potentially cut electricity costs in half at the plant. Methane can also be used to heat boilers in place of natural gas. *We recommend that the city conduct a feasibility study for the installation of a methane recovery system, to include researching potential project funding options from the State of Florida (EPA) Revolving Fund low-interest loan program, or grants from major utility companies such as Florida Power and Light.*



5. Heritage Preservation

Historical, natural, agricultural, and cultural heritage. Preservation and restoration of buildings, homes, churches, cemeteries; heritage sites and/or monuments; heritage parks, historical gardens; historical trees, artifacts; historical society; heritage advisory committee, museums, archives, history books, land trusts/conservation easements and interpretative programs; ordinances and policies including protection of structures/sites from demolition/development. Resource availability. Farmers markets, festivals and parades.	Max Points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Leadership in preservation and restoration initiatives	25	22
Legal protection of heritage sites	25	22
Resource availability for preservation and restoration	25	21
Business		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	15	13
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	15	13
Residential		
Conservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of properties	15	13
Participation in and support of heritage/cultural activities	15	13
Community Involvement		
Volunteer involvement in cultural, historical, and natural heritage activities	20	16
Youth involvement in heritage activities	20	15
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	175.00	148.00

Observations and Recommendations:

We applaud the City of Venice for its commitment to historic preservation. Venice's storied history began in 1925 when the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) purchased land to develop the City of Venice. The BLE hired John Nolen, an early urban planner to design the City of Venice around the newly established Seaboard Air Line Railway Depot, which is now a historic site. Mr. Nolen was the first American that self-identified as a town and city planner. Over his professional career, John Nolen designed urban plans for more than 25 cities and towns across the country. The City of Venice, Florida was one of those cities. Venice is one of three remaining cities that has preserved the original Nolen plan as part of its on-going development and redevelopment policies.

Venice has many organizations that focus on historic preservation. The Venice Area Historical Society operates the historic train depot which is owned by Sarasota County. Venice Heritage Inc. is a private non-profit group of volunteers that support the City of Venice's Museum & Archives and also the Lord-Higel House. The City of Venice owns the Triangle Inn (which is now the home of the Venice Museum & Archives), Eagle Point, and also the Lord-Higel House. There is also the City of Venice Historic Preservation Board that is an advisory body to the Venice City Council. It is rare that we find so many organizations in a city the size of Venice that have relatively similar missions and goals. During our tour of the many historic sites in Venice, it was often challenging to sort out these varying organizational nuances.

We also attempted to identify the membership of the Historic Preservation Board and while we were unable to determine the representative make-up of the Board, we did note that qualifications for membership were non-specific with the exception of a representative from Venice High School. With a mix of both government and non-profit organizations involved in the preservation of Venice's heritage, *we recommend forming a*

centralized committee, board, or group that focuses on activity and fundraising coordination, grant acquisition, and information sharing. This could be achieved by revisiting the membership requirements for the Historic Preservation Board. *We recommend re-defining the HPB membership requirements to include one member from the Venice Area Historical Society and one member of Venice Heritage Inc. We further recommend that a city representative from the Venice Museum & Archives, be the staff appointee to coordinate the meetings of the Historic Preservation Board.* In this manner, all of the proverbial bases are covered and redundancies and cross-purposes are minimized or eliminated altogether.



We enjoyed touring the Lord-Hagel House and noted the progress made since the building was first relocated to its current site. It is unfortunate that this home, because of its relocation and renovation has lost its official historic recognition. However, it will remain as a significant contributing element to Venice's Historic District. Our tour of the Venice Museum and Archives was fascinating. Interactive displays and audio-enhanced displays depict significant contributions and historical events in Venice's history. We commend Mr. James Hagler, Director of Historical Resources, for his tireless efforts in the redevelopment and maintenance of both the Lord-Hagel House and the Museum

and Archives.

The museum contains over 21,000 documents, photos, maps, and artifacts; the vast majority of which are irreplaceable. Many of these items were packaged in museum quality protective material to ensure their preservation. However, the museum does not have any fire suppression systems in or around the building. Given the age of the building and the manner in which materials are stored (see photo at right), a conventional sprinkler system would not be practical. *We recommend visiting <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/emergency-prep/fire-prevention.html> and ensuring that the National Archives recommended fire prevention measures are followed. We further recommend examining the feasibility of relocating these invaluable materials to another location where they can be adequately protected by halon gas, FM 200, or other more contemporary fire suppression systems.*



We were provided with a historic walking tour map of the Venezia Park Historic District. The map was well designed and highlighted 26 different historic homes in and around the Venezia Park neighborhoods. The brochure includes a brief background describing the architectural features, and in a few instances, a brief note about the original owners of the homes. Likewise, the Venice Visitor's Map captures nearly all of the historic sites around the city. We were unable to locate any reference to Eagle Point on the Visitor's Map. It is understood that Eagle Point is now a private neighborhood and guided tours of the historic structures inside Eagle Point must be pre-arranged. However, there are many fascinating and historically significant stories to tell about the clubhouse, guest cottages and the original Tamiami Trail. *We recommend including Eagle Point when the next edition of the map is printed.*

We received two wonderful volumes during our tour of Venice. One was a beautifully illustrated volume called “Experience Venice Florida.” The other was a collection of “Ghost Stories of Venice Old and New.” We also researched the “Images of America” Series and located a historical volume for Venice, Florida published in 2000. *We encourage the Venice Area Historical Society to review and update this volume for republication. Once published we also suggest a broader marketing and distribution of this book throughout the Venice community.* We suspect the original publication is no longer in print, and that most members of the community are not aware of its existence.



One of the highlights of our tour was a walk through the historic train depot at Rollins W. Coakley Railroad Park. Although owned by Sarasota County and operated by the Venice Area Historical Society, this historic railroad station and adjacent static displays, is surrounded by the City of Venice. It also appears to share a parking lot with the city-owned Legacy Park. In many states, general urban planning discourages the existence of “county islands,” particularly when utilities and other infrastructure support is provided by the surrounding city government. Despite the fact that the train depot resulted from the extension of the Seaboard Air Line Railway tracks from Sarasota

County into what is now the City of Venice, there appears to be more historical significance today for the city of Venice, as opposed to Sarasota County. Providing there is a willingness to do so, *we recommend taking a closer look at the potential for either an annexation (if land is owned by the County), or a dedication of the site from Sarasota County to the City of Venice, if just the buildings and static displays are owned.*

The Venice Center Mall, the former winter home of the Kentucky Military Institute, features a front to back story board in the park across the street from the mall. At first glance, we felt that the story board should be placed closer to the front entrance of the Mall; perhaps in one of the planted areas near the parkway. However, after reading about the site, it was evident that placing it across the street allowed for a view of the entire building elevation and made it much easier to reference the story board with the structure itself.

We congratulate the City of Venice for their Historic Preservation efforts. Well done!



6. Overall Impression

Lack of litter and graffiti. Maintenance of public open spaces, medians and boulevard strips, streets, sidewalks, walking and biking trails, curbs, ditches, road shoulders, unattended and vacant lots, buildings, garbage/recycling receptacles; lack of weeds, dog waste policies and receptacles, notices/posters appropriately displayed, vandalism not evident. Maintenance of the hardscape: walls, lamp posts, benches, playgrounds, etc. Appropriate use and placement of sculpture, public art, wayfinding signs, graphic elements such as banners, signs and murals.	Max points	Actual Score
Municipal		
Overall cleanliness	10	8
Maintenance of public roads and shoulders	10	8
Condition of public buildings and properties	10	8
Impact of graphic elements - banners, wayfinding signs, murals, etc.	10	7
Business		
Overall cleanliness	20	17
Condition of buildings and properties	20	17
Residential		
Overall cleanliness	10	8
Condition of buildings and properties	10	7
Community Involvement		
Participation in clean-up efforts, adopt-a-spot, annual cleanup days, etc.	15	13
Recognition of volunteer efforts	10	8
Total (the fields automatically calculate – do not type in them)	125.00	101.00

Observations and Recommendations

We were very impressed with the overall cleanliness of the city. Venice was virtually graffiti and litter free with well-maintained streets and gutters along the main thoroughfares, an indication that Venice has in place an effective street-sweeping program.



Venice is very much a bicycle-oriented community. With the development of Legacy Park and the Historic Train Depot, enhancements and connectivity occurred with the two main bike trails through the City of Venice. The Legacy Trail extends approximately 10½ miles to the north and the Venetian Waterway Trail extends 8 ½ miles to the south of the Depot. The trail has been featured in many cycling publications and has received top honors as one of the premier biking trails in the country by Trip Advisor. While touring the historic train depot, we observed dozens of cyclists utilizing the trail along with joggers and walkers.

Because of its proximity to waterways, canals, and ponds, the trail network is not without potential hazards. The photo at the right was taken by a cyclist who managed to pass this rather large alligator at a moderate rate of speed. The cyclist in the photo is hesitant and clearly fearful of an encounter. While cyclists moving rapidly down the pathway may be somewhat safe, this may not be the case with joggers or walkers, particularly smaller children. *We recommend a closer examination of the areas adjacent to the Legacy Trail and Venetian Waterway Trail, where these potential hazards might exist. Consideration should be given to erecting alligator barriers where practical, and also additional warning signs along each trail in appropriate areas.* It would be unfortunate for an encounter to occur on such a pristine and popular trail network.



Venice should be proud of its public art program. We observed many sculptures, murals, and statuary during our tour. One of our favorites was “History Venice” which was painted on the side of the Gondolier Building adjacent to and facing the Intracoastal Waterway. Another favorite was entitled “Paradise” located in Michael Biel Park. *We recommend the continued expansion of the Venice Mural Program, perhaps incorporating them along pedestrian pass-throughs and also along some of the smaller streets in the*

downtown core. The Venice Art Center features several rooms that display the works of local artists. However, it appears there was no program to allow local sculptors to display their work throughout the city on a rotational basis. The City of Venice has a Public Art Advisory Board that promotes all facets of the arts and culture in Venice. *We recommend that the Advisory Board explore the potential for public art sculptures by local artists to be displayed in designated spaces throughout the downtown core on a seasonal, or rotational basis. We also recommend siting the displays along West Venice Avenue, particularly along the pathways that traverse the landscaped medians.*

Related to the statuary; we were very pleased to see the bronze animal sculptures in the Arboretum. However, the recently added white yard sculptures of the four seasons and lions heads seemed out of proportion to their surroundings. It was also difficult to associate the theme of these sculptures with their immediate environment. *We recommend relocating the smaller statuary to a static display around the Venice Art Center or perhaps adjacent to other public buildings that reflect Mediterranean / Italian architecture. The vacated sites could then be used for sculptures developed by local artists that perhaps better complement the setting and theme of the sites.*



Venice has made progress with their entry and directional signage. We noted much improved signage throughout the city. We also noted signage that needed additional attention. The boardwalk near the snack bar at the Venice Beach end of West Venice Avenue is posted with several separate signs, all of which carry stern warnings or prohibitive messages. The beach is a major tourist attraction and signage can and does influence the impression that visitors take away from their beach experience.



There are ways in which admonishments, rules and regulations can be displayed on a single sign in a friendlier, more congenial manner. *We recommend taking a photo of the existing sign array at the entry to the boardwalk and enlisting the services of a sign-maker to design signage similar to what is pictured at the left. We also recommend that similar signage strategies be applied consistently to other major beach or marina entries where multiple warning signs are arrayed.*

We toured John Nolan Park and were delighted to see the historical story boards along the pathways throughout the park. Given the significant contributions of John Nolan, it is fitting that he be honored accordingly. As we walked through the park, we noted several areas that needed attention. First was the park sign at the entry. And second was the loosely arranged picnic tables.



We recommend a new John Nolan Park monument sign that is befitting of Mr. Nolan's historic contributions to the City of Venice. We also recommend that newer, more formal picnic areas be constructed throughout the

park with newer tables placed on level concrete pads. Lastly, we recommend that both trash and recycle bins similar to those in Legacy Park be placed near picnic areas in John Nolan Park. It would be appropriate to incorporate each of these recommendation into a new Park Renovation Plan as mentioned earlier in the Landscaped Areas section.

Venice has made tremendous progress since their first year of affiliation with America in Bloom. We were so grateful to be included in the volunteer picnic the final night of our tour. It was such a delight to witness the incredible pride and volunteer spirit forthcoming from the members of the city Staff, Venice in Bloom and Venice Area Beautification Inc. You truly do leave a positive and lasting Overall Impression.



Checklist:

Yes	No	N/A	
X			Were the judges given a Community Profile, Evaluation Tour Itinerary, and map prior to their arrival?
X			Did the Evaluation Tour Itinerary provide for experiencing a representative cross-section of the community?
X			Were the guides knowledgeable about the community and horticultural aspects?
X			Were the judges able to modify the schedule if needed?
	X		Did the judges meet with the media?
X			Did the judges meet with municipal leaders?
X			Were the judges asked to give presentations?
X			Were the judges able to meet with and talk to volunteers?
X			Was enough time allotted to complete the Evaluation Report in a quiet place?
	X		Were you informed about pollinator gardens? How many? (Please use comments section to add details if necessary.)
x			Was there a wrap-up session at the end of the tour?

Comments:**DEFINITIONS (determined by who owns and/or manages the property)**

Municipal: city hall and other municipal properties, parks and open spaces, roads, roadsides, sidewalks, public cemeteries, public schools/universities/colleges, sports facilities, empty lots and brownfields, libraries, hospitals, public railway and bus stations

Business: commercial and industrial sectors, shopping centers, stores, office buildings, restaurants, mixed use developments, service stations, private railway and bus stations, plant nurseries, garden centers, assisted living/nursing home/graduated care facilities, apartment buildings, hotels, private hospitals, churches, not for profit/civic organizations, private cemeteries, private schools/universities/colleges, residential common areas managed by associations

Residential: single family residences, town houses, individual homes in planned/gated/manufactured home communities, residential neighborhoods or developments

Community Involvement: volunteer efforts by individuals, clubs, youth groups, church groups, civic organizations, volunteer municipal boards, and social clubs for community enhancement



2016 Special Mentions 2016 Community Recognitions

Community: Venice, Florida

Recognized Criterion: Overall Impression

Touring the City of Venice was a delightful experience. The city just sparkles. Venice has implemented many of the recommendations of past judges and their progress is evident at every turn. New monument signs, attractive directional signage throughout the city, and beautiful murals greet each visitor to Venice. A walk down Venice Avenue in the downtown core is a must. It is an eclectic mix of shops and restaurants. New floral and public art displays are proudly in place in many areas throughout the city. Venice truly is a special place. Congratulations Venice, Florida!

Noteworthy Project or Initiative: Legacy Park Development

Venice's most noteworthy project in 2015 was the Hatchett Creek Restoration Project. This project transformed a former 10 acre cement plant into what is now Legacy Park. The project involved the demolition of the plant buildings and the removal of over 6,000 tons of concrete material from along the creek bed. The concrete was crushed and recycled into road base materials for use on other road construction projects. Trimming of invasive mangroves occurred as well, allowing for wildlife observation points as well as creation of a launching ramp for kayaks and canoes. Other debris and trash were removed from the creek resulting in a significant improvement to water quality, along with the restoration of wetlands and habitats. With the dedication of Legacy Park there is now a formal connection between the Legacy Trail and Venetian Waterway Trail.

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