



# Programming with Purpose: First Impressions Hosting an Engaging Program Kick-Off

December 11, 2025

Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

# Welcome!

Introduce yourself in the chat. Share your **name** and **pronouns**, your **agency**, and one of your **favorite public spaces visited in 2025**.

**Forest Ridge Park, Raleigh, North Carolina →**

One of a series of activities hosted by Raleigh Parks to increase participation in recreation programs by under-resourced communities



# Programming with Purpose

## Session 2 Agenda

### Webinar (1 hour)

- Presentations on hosting a welcoming and engaging program kick off
  - Camden, NJ- Brian Fisher, Project Manager, Camden Community Partnership**
  - BREC, Baton Rouge - Claire Coco, Assistant Director of Recreation**
  - Greensboro, NC- Shannon Teamer, CPRP Recreation Centers Superintendent**
- Q&A with Speakers

### *Transition*

### Committed Cohort (30 minutes)

- Small group discussions
- Report out
- Closing and next steps



# Programming with Purpose

Path to  
Participation

*October 16*



Bridging  
Divides

*February 12*



Measure  
What Matters

*June 11*



**First  
Impressions**  
*December 11*

Maximize  
Programming  
*April 9*

# What stops people from participating in park programs?

## Practical Barriers

Cost of programs

Transportation

Language accessibility

Childcare

## Social Barriers

Sense of safety

Sense of belonging

Lack of trust

Feeling connected to others



# First Impressions

*Consider what steps you can take*

- Before your program starts**
- During your first day of program**
- After your first session**

*to make participants feel welcome.*



# Hosting an Engaging Program Kickoff

December 11, 2025

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

**Our Mission**  
To serve as the catalyst for the preservation and growth of a vibrant Camden.

**Our Vision**  
Camden is an equitable, thriving city, with high-quality opportunities for individuals, families, and businesses.

**Our Values**  
*Equity*      *Relationships*      *Resilience*

**Our How**  
We learn about the issues most pressing to our city, identify potential partners and solutions, and convene the right stakeholders to make change happen.

Neighborhood Development

Economic Development



Camden Brand

Capacity Building

# Approaching Kick-Offs Park Programming

## CCP's 4 Core Principles:

### **1. Understand the local context.**

- Each neighborhood has its own culture – youth-driven, senior-focused, or family-oriented.

### **1. Use trusted messengers.**

- Partner with faith leaders, block captains, and resident groups.

### **1. Meet people where they are.**

- Host events in parks, schools, or community centers – not City Hall.

### **1. Reflect the neighborhood's culture.**

- Include local food, music, and vendors to make engagement feel like a community gathering.



# Building Authentic Partnerships

- Identify authentic community leaders
- Give them a platform to lead
- Move from **transactional to transformational** relationships
- Center trust-building through **transparency and follow-up**
- Celebrate community leadership



Camden Night Gardens



Peace Games



**CAMDEN COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIP**  
DRIVEN BY PROGRESS | FOCUSED ON EQUITY

# Laying the Groundwork for Success

## **1. Pre-engage key stakeholders.**

- Meet with local leaders and partner organizations before announcing the program.



## **1. Co-create the agenda.**

- Design meetings with residents, not for them.



## **1. Communicate early and often.**

- Use multiple channels – flyers, texts, social media – at least two weeks out.



## **1. Establish visible follow-up.**

- End each meeting with next steps, dates, and volunteer opportunities.

# Elijah Perry Park Park Program Kick Off

- 3.5-acre park in Camden's Centerville neighborhood
- Surrounded by new homes, a library, church, a school, a community center, and a health clinic
- Funded by Choice Neighborhoods Grant & U.S. EPA brownfield cleanup
- Transformed from a contaminated site into a vibrant public space
- Engagement driven by trusted neighborhood leaders



# Elijah Perry Park Event



Skills & Drills Clinic



EPP Ribbon Cutting



EPP Movie Night

# Key Takeaways



- Success starts before the kickoff – with listening and relationship-building.
- Engagement should feel local, inclusive, and action-oriented.
- Partnerships thrive when CCP acts as a collaborator, not just a project lead.
- Every program should foster long-term community stewardship.

**“A strong program kick-off isn’t just about launching an initiative – it’s about creating a shared table where the community helps write the story.”**



**CAMDEN COMMUNITY  
PARTNERSHIP**  
DRIVEN BY PROGRESS | FOCUSED ON EQUITY



# Thank You

# JOURNEY MAPPING: DYNAMIC ORIGINS OF THE PATRON EXPERIENCE



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](#)

# CASE STUDY: BLUEBONNET SWAMP NATURE CENTER / BATON ROUGE, LA



Presenter Info	<p>Claire Coco, Assistant Department Director @ BREC (25+ years) <a href="mailto:Claire.Coco@brec.org">Claire.Coco@brec.org</a>; (225) 413-5355</p>
Presentation Benefit #1	<p>Be able to define journey mapping and apply the process to better understand what factors can influence patron experiences</p>
Presentation Benefit #2	<p>Learn strategies to identify pain points and eliminate or relieve patron “baggage”</p>
Presentation Benefit #3	<p>Gain insight into how to effectively prepare your site and train staff to function transformatively, ensuring memorable and positive patron experiences</p>



**REAL QUICK... SIDE NOTE:**

**BREC IS VAST.**



# EXPLORE WHAT BREC HAS TO OFFER

HIGHLAND ROAD  
PARK OBSERVATORY



6568 PARK ACRES

175 PARKS 56 REC CENTERS

122 PLAYGROUNDS

73.4 MILES OF PARK TRAILS

9.75 MILES OF GREENWAYS

4.8 MILES OF NATURE TRAILS

24.9 MILES OF PRIMITIVE TRAILS

4 COMMUNITY GARDENS

3 NATIVE POLLINATOR GARDENS

3,350 ACRES OF CONSERVATION LAND

33 INDOOR BASKETBALL COURTS

149 BASKETBALL HALF-COURTS

80 BASKETBALL FULL-COURTS

1 CRICKET PITCH

5 TENNIS CENTERS

135 TENNIS COURTS

51 VOLLEYBALL COURTS

247 ATHLETIC FIELDS

3 STADIUMS

5 GOLF COURSES

3 DRIVING RANGES

2 ARCHERY RANGES

4 DISC GOLF COURSES

4 FITNESS CENTERS

21 OUTDOOR FITNESS STATIONS

3 BOCCE BALL COURTS

1 CROQUET COURT

BATON ROUGE GALLERY

NORTH 14TH STREET BOXING CENTER

INDEPENDENCE BOTANICAL GARDEN

LAURENS HENRY COHN, SR MEMORIAL PLANT ARBORETUM

4 SWIMMING POOLS

8 SPLASH PADS

16 FISHING LAKES

2 BLUEWAY TRAILHEADS

5 CANOE/KAYAK LAUNCHES

LIBERTY LAGOON [AQUATICS CENTER]

1 SURFING SIMULATOR  
5 THRILL SLIDES

MAGNOLIA MOUND

EXTREME SPORTS COMPLEX

BLUEBONNET SWAMP NATURE CENTER

BATON ROUGE ZOO

JEAN LAFITTE AIR GUN RANGE

FARR PARK EQUESTRIAN CENTER

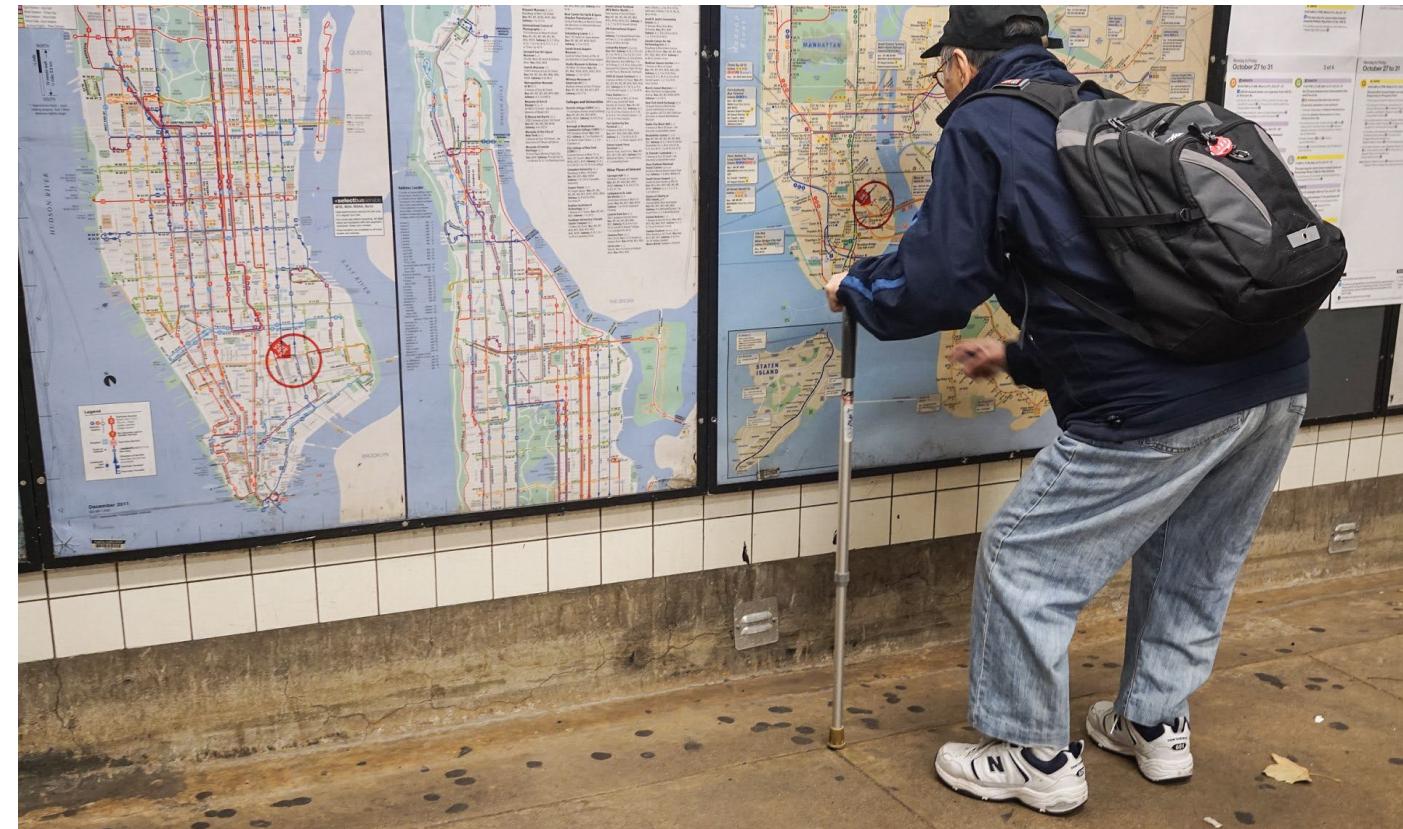
INDEPENDENCE PARK THEATRE + CULTURAL CENTER

6 DOG PARKS

# JOURNEY MAPPING BLUEBONNET SWAMP



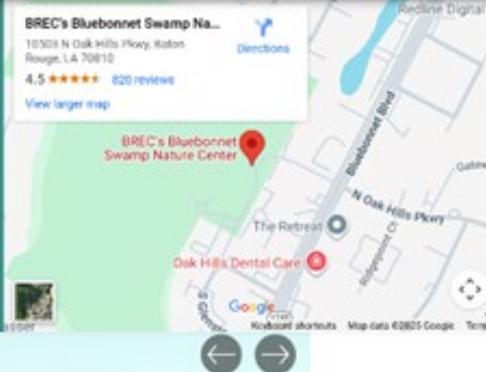
- ▶▶ Patron experience begins well before arriving to your door.
- ▶▶ What does *the map to you* look like? It's not just about roads and traffic lights.
- ▶▶ Where does your first impression *actually* begin?
- ▶▶ Let's start the patron journey to Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, the swamp in the heart of Louisiana's capital city.
- ▶▶ Think about what you're expecting.
- ▶▶ Now, let's GOOGLE!





# Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center

102.75 Acres



- ▶▶▶ This is the current webpage.
- ▶▶▶ First impression?
- ▶▶▶ Did you have any expectations based on the site's name or slogan ("swamp in the city")?
- ▶▶▶ Were those expectations met? What do you feel?
- ▶▶▶ Patron pain point = patron "baggage"
- ▶▶▶ Let's scroll down...





Amenities	
Wi-Fi	Restrooms
Conservation Area	Nature Trails
Tourist Attraction	

#### VISIT THE SWAMP

#### EXHIBIT BUILDING

The Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center provides the means for people to make meaningful, lasting connections to nature through environmental education and recreation opportunities while also exploring the relationship between people and Bluebonnet Swamp Conservation Area landscapes and how they have and continue to influence each other.

This 103-acre facility is dedicated to conservation, education, recreation and tourism in Baton Rouge. It houses an award-winning, 9500-square-foot building filled with live animal exhibits; photographic presentations of the site's flora and fauna; natural artifact and mineral displays; and a sizeable, vintage waterfowl decoy carving collection. Ecology and art exhibits are featured periodically.

Over a mile of gravel paths and boardwalks link varied habitats such as the cypress-tupelo swamp, beech-magnolia and hardwood forests. Wildlife is plentiful at Bluebonnet Swamp, including hundreds of bird species utilizing the site throughout the year. Birders can view seasonal species during peak migrations, as well as year-round residents. While snakes and turtles are commonly seen from the trails, raccoons, rabbits, opossums, armadillos, squirrels, foxes, coyotes, deer and otter are also known to inhabit the site.

Accessibility: Our trails are either boardwalks or gravel paths that are generally suitable for most wheelchairs.

#### Founding Land Conservation Sponsors 1987-1997

BREC  
Vulcan Chemicals  
ExxonMobil  
Baton Rouge Area Foundation

**LOCATION**  
10503 N. Oak Hill Parkway  
Baton Rouge, LA 70810

**360° INTERACTIVE VIEW**

**CONTACT**  
225-757-8905  
swampevents@brec.org

**HOURLY**  
Tues-Sat: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
Sunday: noon - 5 p.m.  
Last admission to trails at 4:15 p.m.  
Site closes and gate is locked at 5 p.m.  
Closed: Mondays

**ADMISSION**  
Ages 2 and younger: free  
Ages 3-17: \$2  
Ages 18-64: \$3  
Ages 65 and older: \$2.50  
Full-time college students with university ID: \$2.50  
Annual passes available

**G** Leave a Google Review  
**F** Like us on Facebook  
**V** View Park Improvements  
**R** Rapid Response

## Visit the Swamp

BLUEBONNET SWAMP NATURE CENTER TRAIL MAP

### Pet Policy

The Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center in Baton Rouge has a "no pets" policy except on designated days. Call 225-757-8905 for more information on our Dog Days program, when visitors are allowed to enjoy the Swamp with their canine companions.

### Volunteering

Are local the the Baton Rouge area and interested in Louisiana natural science? Can you donate at least three hours per week to the nature center? Then BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp is for you. Contact BREC's Volunteer Coordinator at 225-272-9200, 1446 or [volunteer@brec.org](mailto:volunteer@brec.org) for more information.

Explore current volunteer opportunities. <https://brec.givepulse.com/group/1272095-Bluebonnet-Swamp-Nature-Center>

### Field Trip Information

The Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center has options for educators and camps seeking an exciting field trip. Check out our [Swamp Education](#) to learn more.

REQUEST A FIELD TRIP

REQUEST A SUMMER FIELD TRIP ENTER

### Community Tours

Community Tours are available Tuesday-Friday and Sunday at 2 p.m. January-May and August-December. Tours are only available on Sundays at 2 p.m. in June and July. Registration in advance is preferred due to limited availability.

### Swamp Programs

Looking for something fun and educational way to get your kids active? Check out our [Swamp Programs](#) to learn about Trail Time for Toddlers and Swamp School.

### Birthday Parties + Rentals

Our beyond-average location will ensure your events, whether for a birthday, shower, wedding or event business meetings are memorable!

### Annual Pass Program

Pass Price Breakdown	EBR Residents	Out of Parish (+20%)
Individual (age: >65)	\$25.00	\$30.00
Seniors (age: 65+)	\$20.00	\$24.00
Students (College)	\$20.00	\$24.00
Family (4 person pass)	\$35.00	\$42.00
Additional person to Family Pass	\$ 5.00	\$6.00

### Annual Pass Holder Benefits

- Free access to the Swamp during operating hours
- Free admission to the Swamp's General Admission Programs (ie. Dog Day, Flashlight Night, and Bird Walk)
- Discounted admission to Bluebonnet Swamp's special events

### Biz Pass

If your business is looking for ways to add to employee benefits, increase overall health and wellness, support the environment, expand team building, volunteer and get more involved in the community, then our Swamp Biz Pass is for YOU.

BIZ PASS	5 PPL	10 PPL	30 PPL
1 Year Biz Pass	\$250	\$475	\$1350
3 Year Biz Pass	\$675	\$1285	\$3645
5 Year Biz Pass	\$1000	\$1900	\$5400

20% increase for out-of-parish businesses.

### Biz Pass Individual Pass Holder Benefits:

- Free access to the Swamp during operating hours
- Free admission to Bluebonnet Swamp's special events
- 10% Discount to the Bluebonnet Swamp's Beehive Gift Shop

### Business Benefits:

- 50% discount off 8 hours a month of business rentals during operating hours
- A guided swamp experience (3 hours) including an animal presentation, trail tour and team building exercise
- Free BSNC magnet

### Exhibit Building

The award-winning exhibit building is an impressive structure combining the natural tones of wood and the illuminating effects of light to create an open-air feeling. Young visitors will surely enjoy the live animal displays, as well as the touch tables that are covered with items like snakeskin, feathers, pelts, skulls and other natural artifacts. More mature audiences might enjoy viewing the carving displays and picking up some free educational materials at the information table. Guests can find a variety of nature-related gifts and souvenirs in The Bee Hive, while also observing a real, working beehive and hunting for the marked queen.

Small business groups (up to 40 people) using the center's conference room will find the beautiful surroundings of this site quite inspiring during breaks. Larger groups (up to 150 people) can reserve the entire building for evening events as well.

### Upcoming Programs & Events

VIEW ALL →

 JAN 15	 JAN 15	 JAN 16	 JAN 22	 JAN 23
Storytime at the Swamp	Swamp Art Soiree	Swamp Art Spectacular	Storytime at the Swamp	Craft Corner At The Swamp

(???)



(???)

# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY ONLINE



**BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center**

13K likes • 14K followers



[Send Email](#)

[Liked](#)

[Message](#)

[Posts](#) [About](#) [Channels](#) [Mentions](#) [Reviews](#) [Reels](#) [More](#) [...](#)

[Switch into BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center's Page to start managing it.](#)

[Switch Now](#)

## Intro

Connecting people with nature, BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center is a 103-acre facility dedicated to conservation, education,

## Posts

[Filters](#)



BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center is at BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature

▶▶▶ This is the site's current Facebook page.

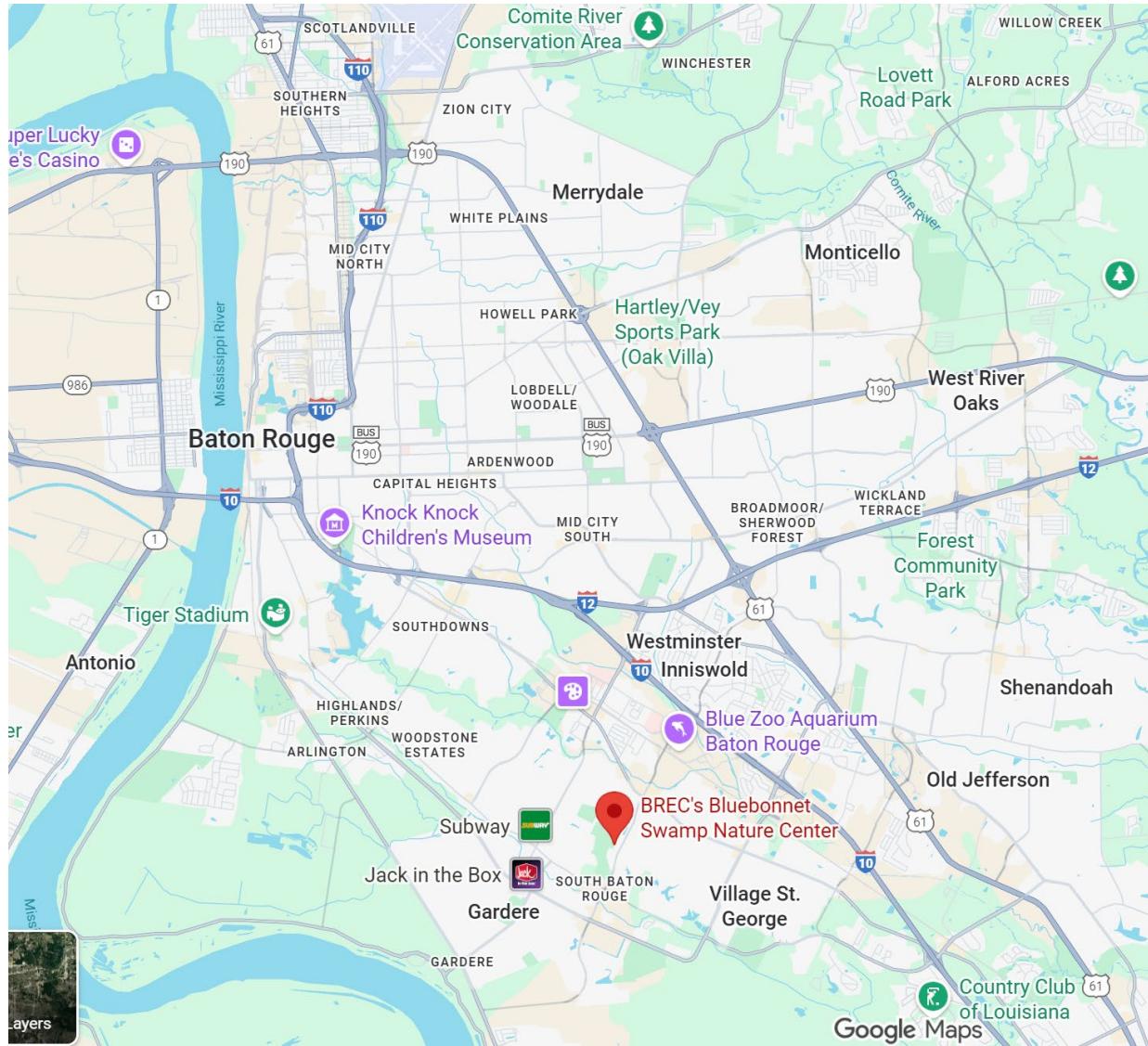
▶▶▶ Impressions?

▶▶▶ How do the visual components here compare to your expectations?

▶▶▶ Any baggage picked up here?

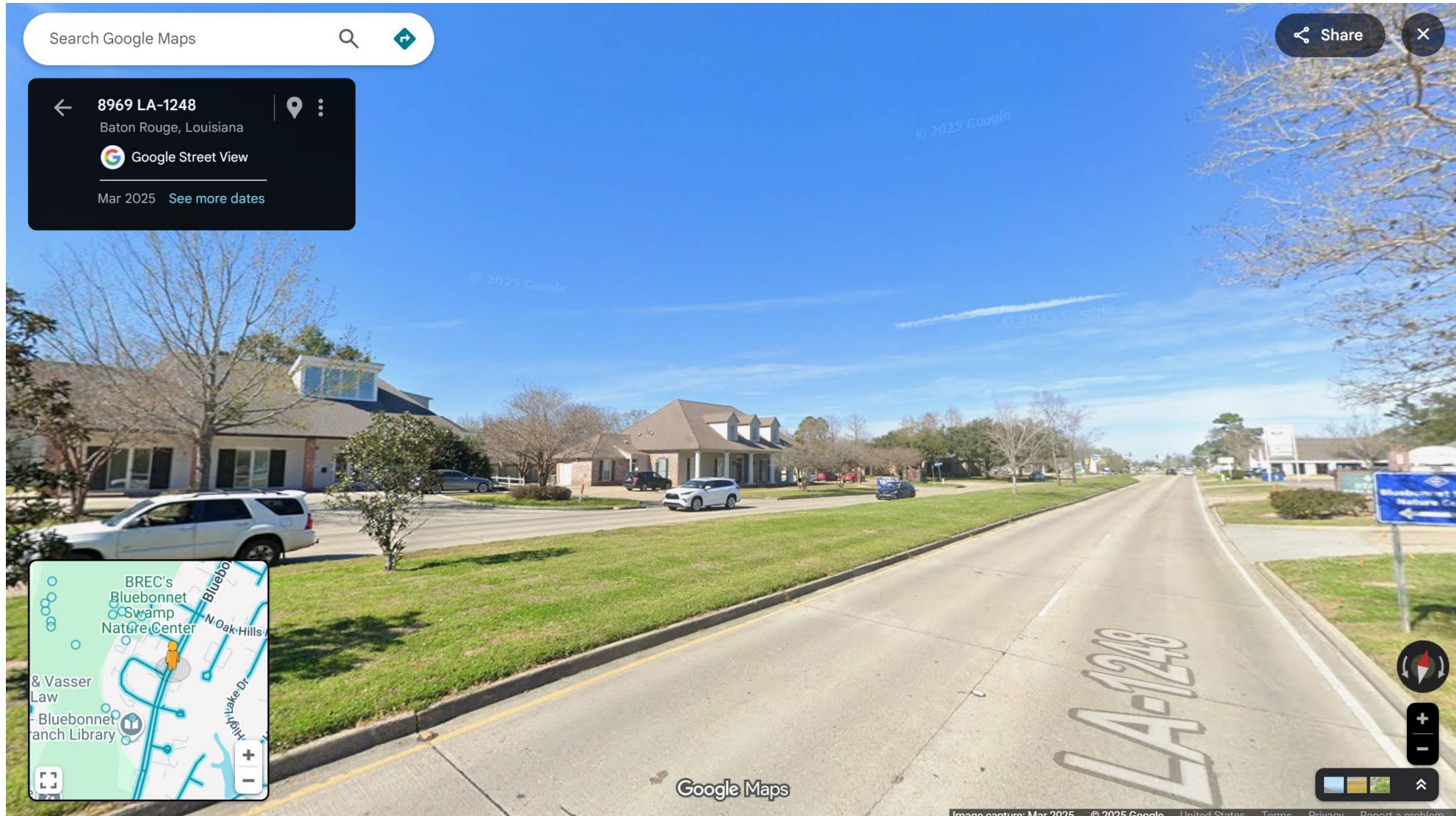
▶▶▶ Anything to note?

# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – *ROAD TRIP!*

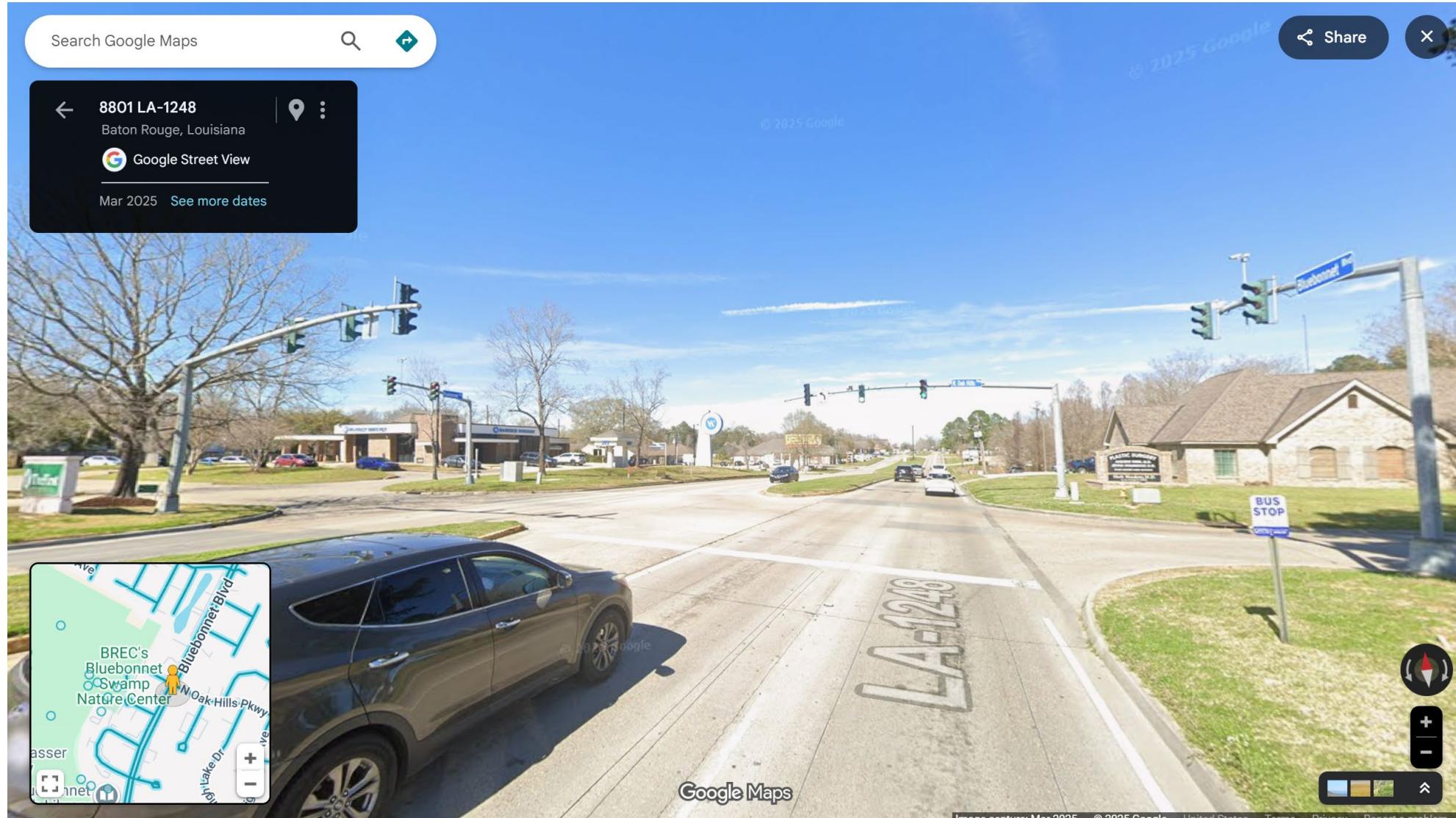


- ▶▶▶ Site conveniently located and accessible via public transportation routes, just minutes from downtown BR and the universities via multiple interstate and highway routes.
- ▶▶▶ LOTS of nearby restaurants, shops, businesses, malls, etc.
- ▶▶▶ High traffic zone, at times (can easily cause unintended patron baggage – be cognizant of that!)

# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY OF EXPECTATION



# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – WHERE'S THE SIGN?



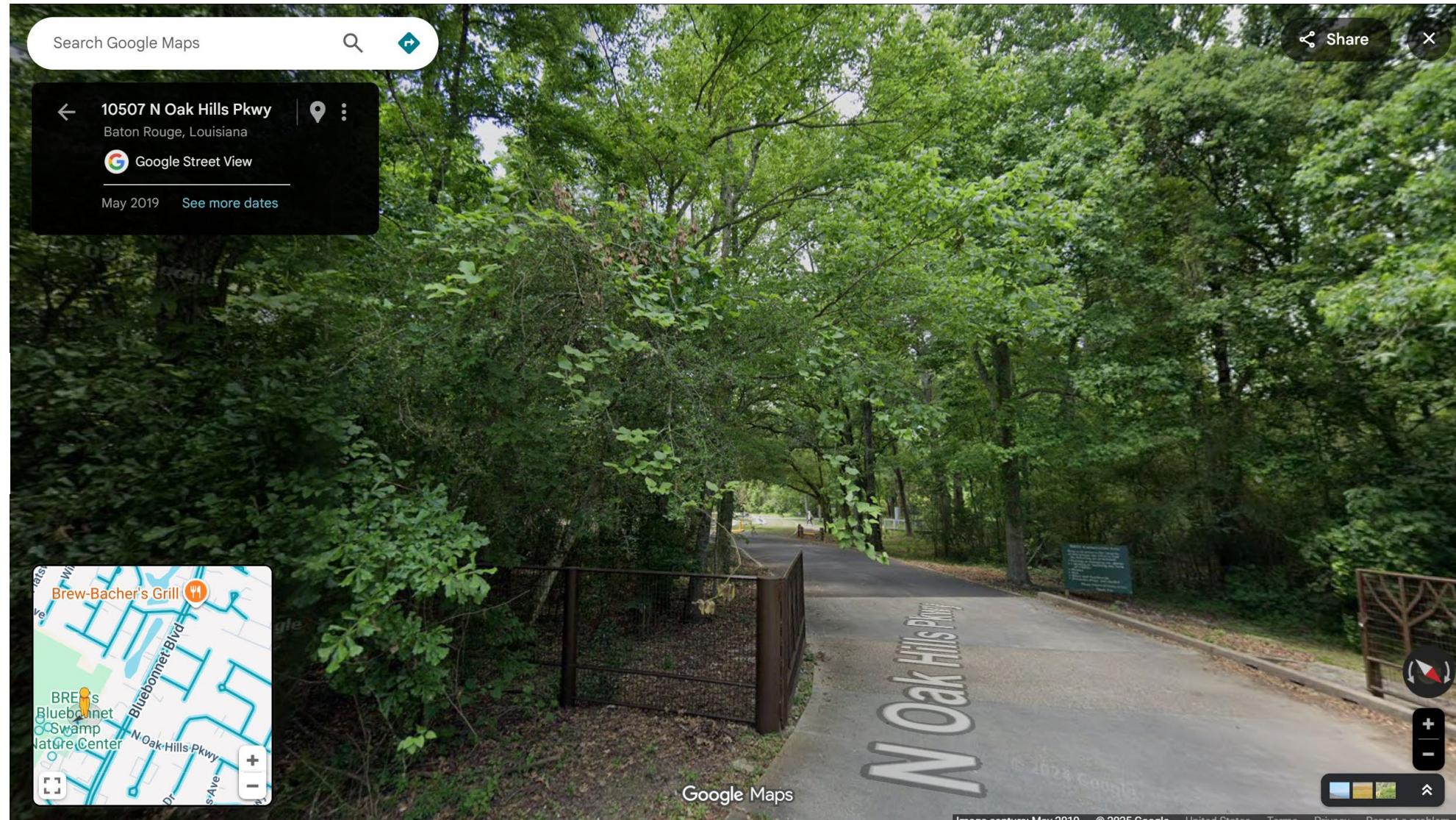
Google Maps

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# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – ARE WE ON THE RIGHT PATH?



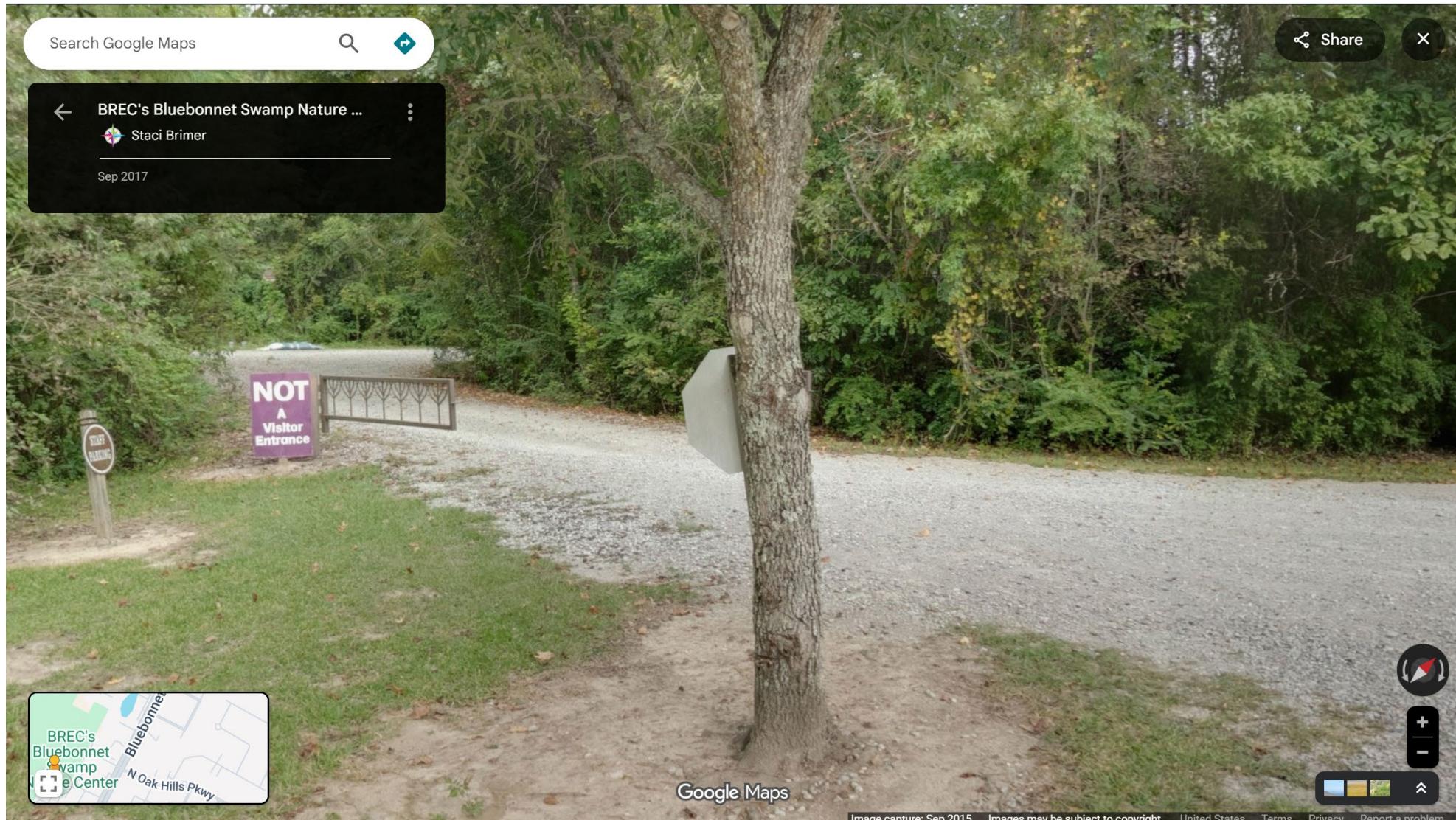
# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – ARE WE THERE YET?



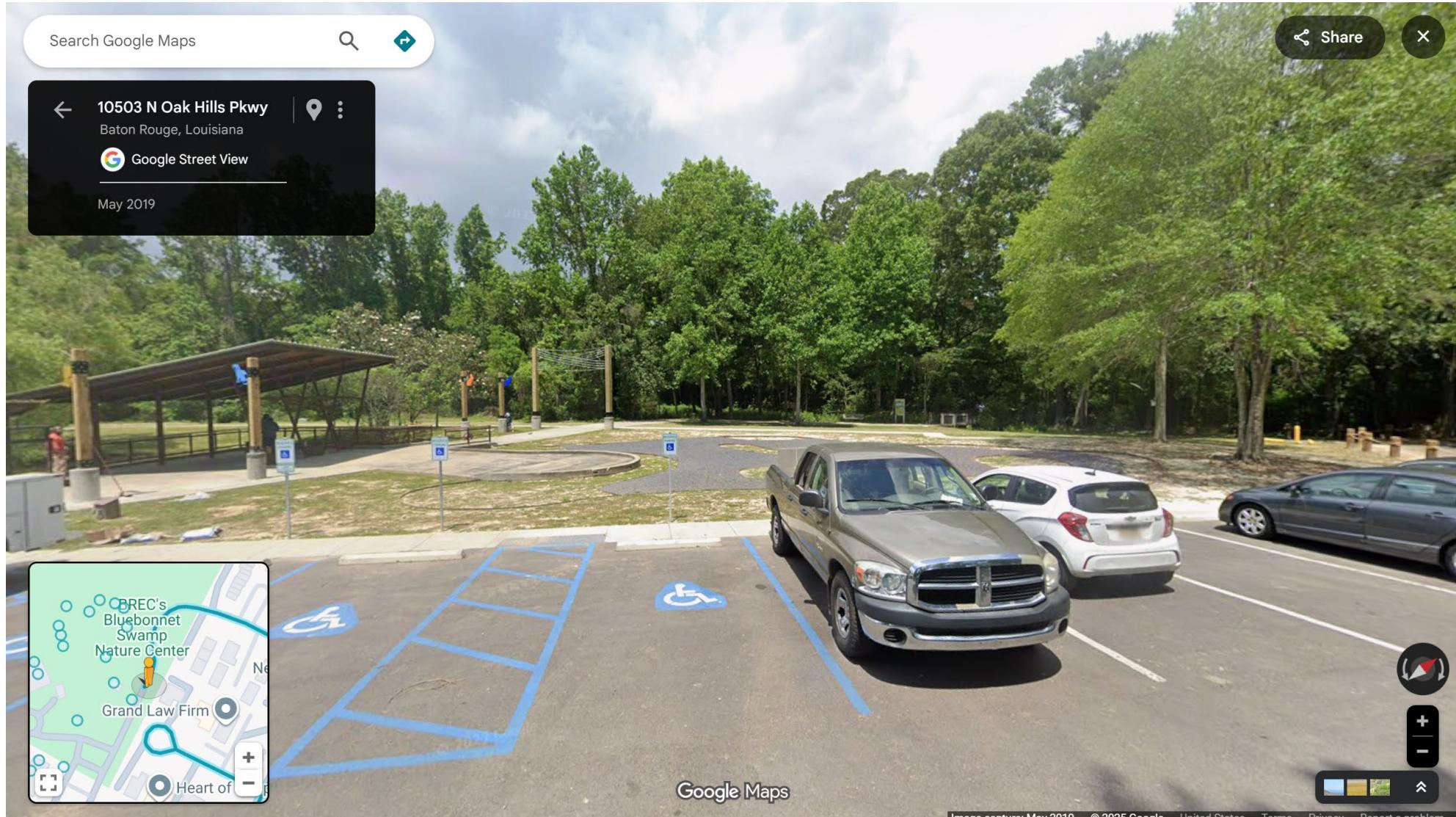
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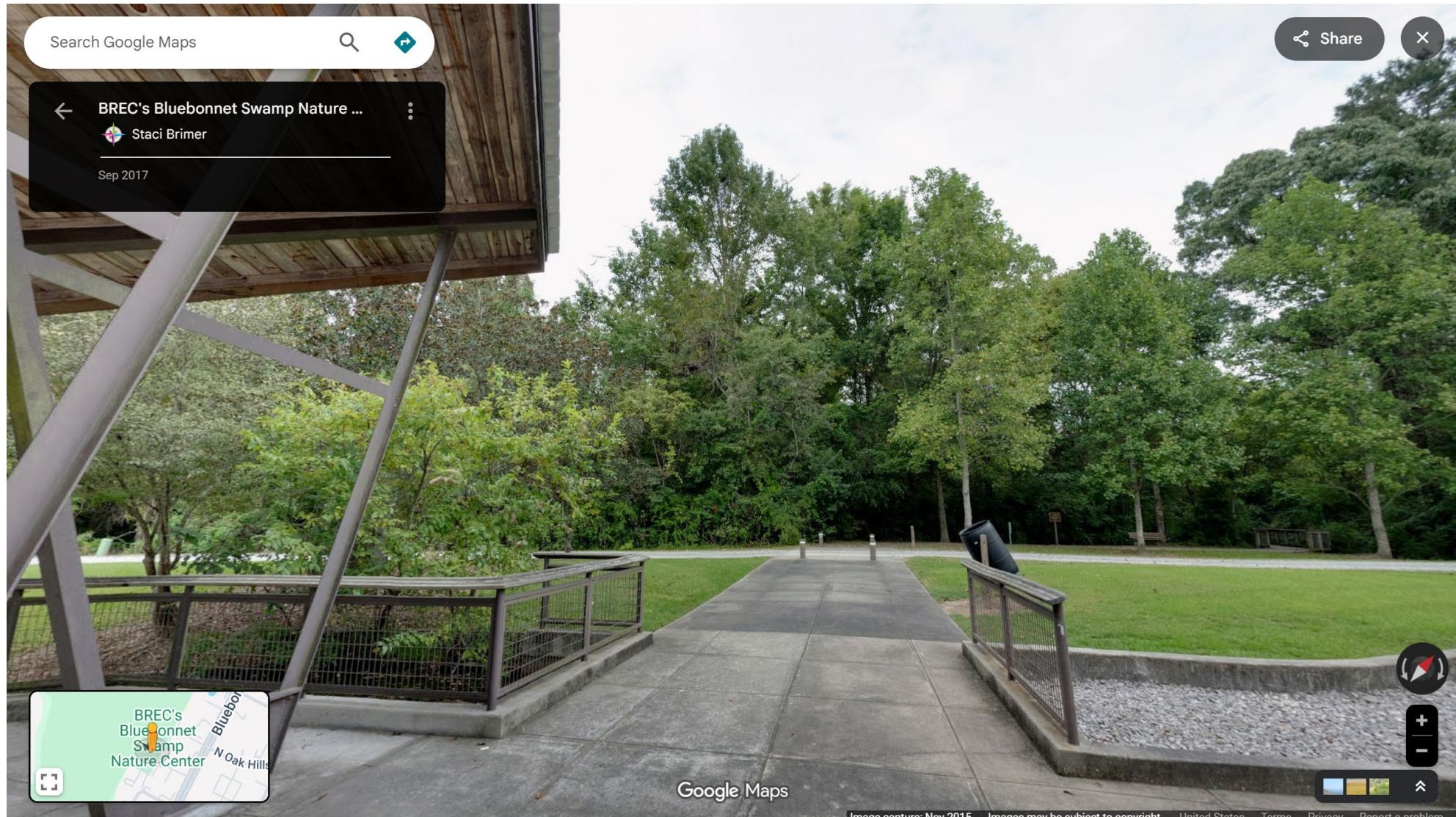
# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – WHERE DO WE PARK?



# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – PARK HERE; THEN WHAT?



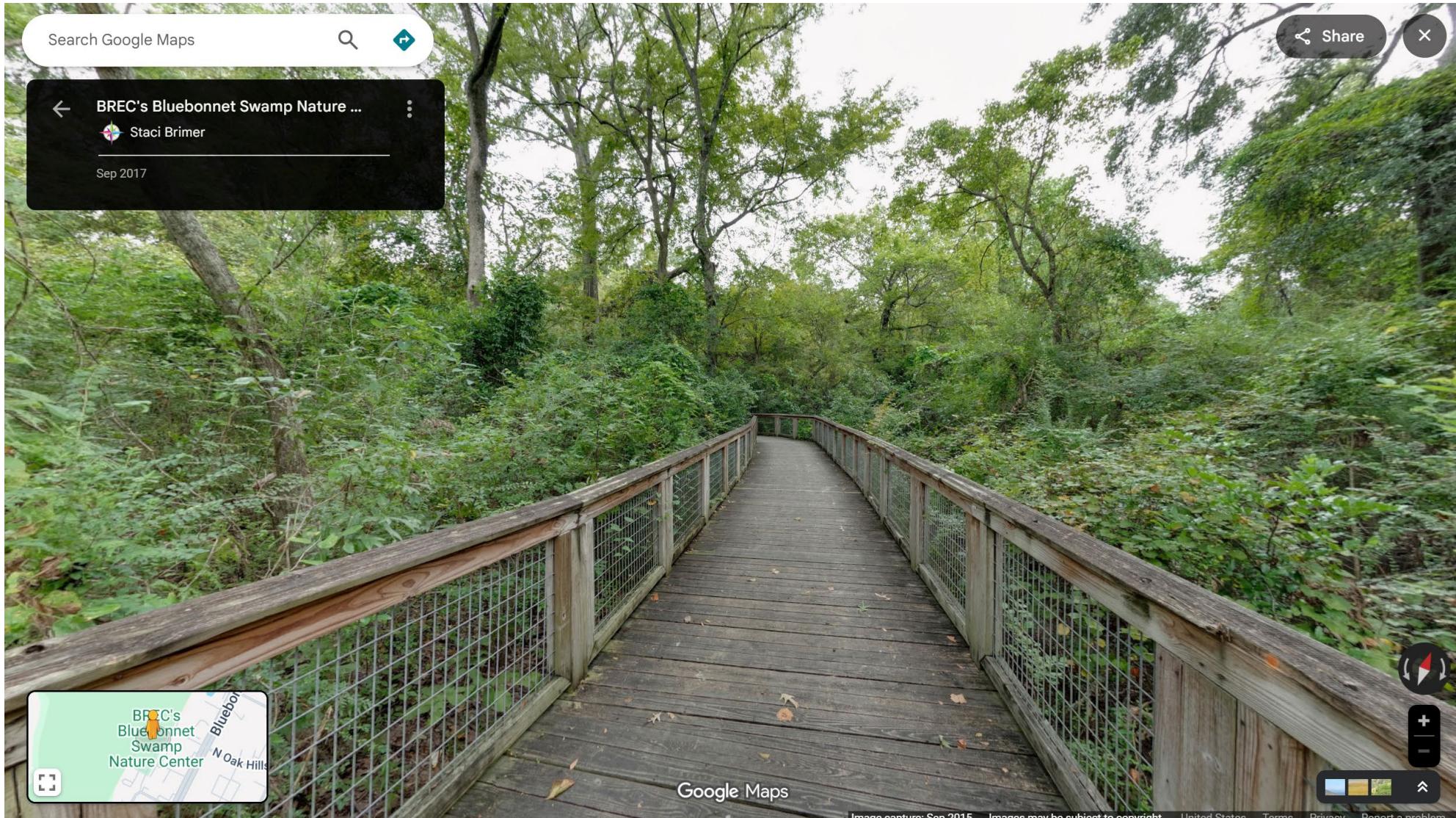
# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – DO WE GO THIS WAY???



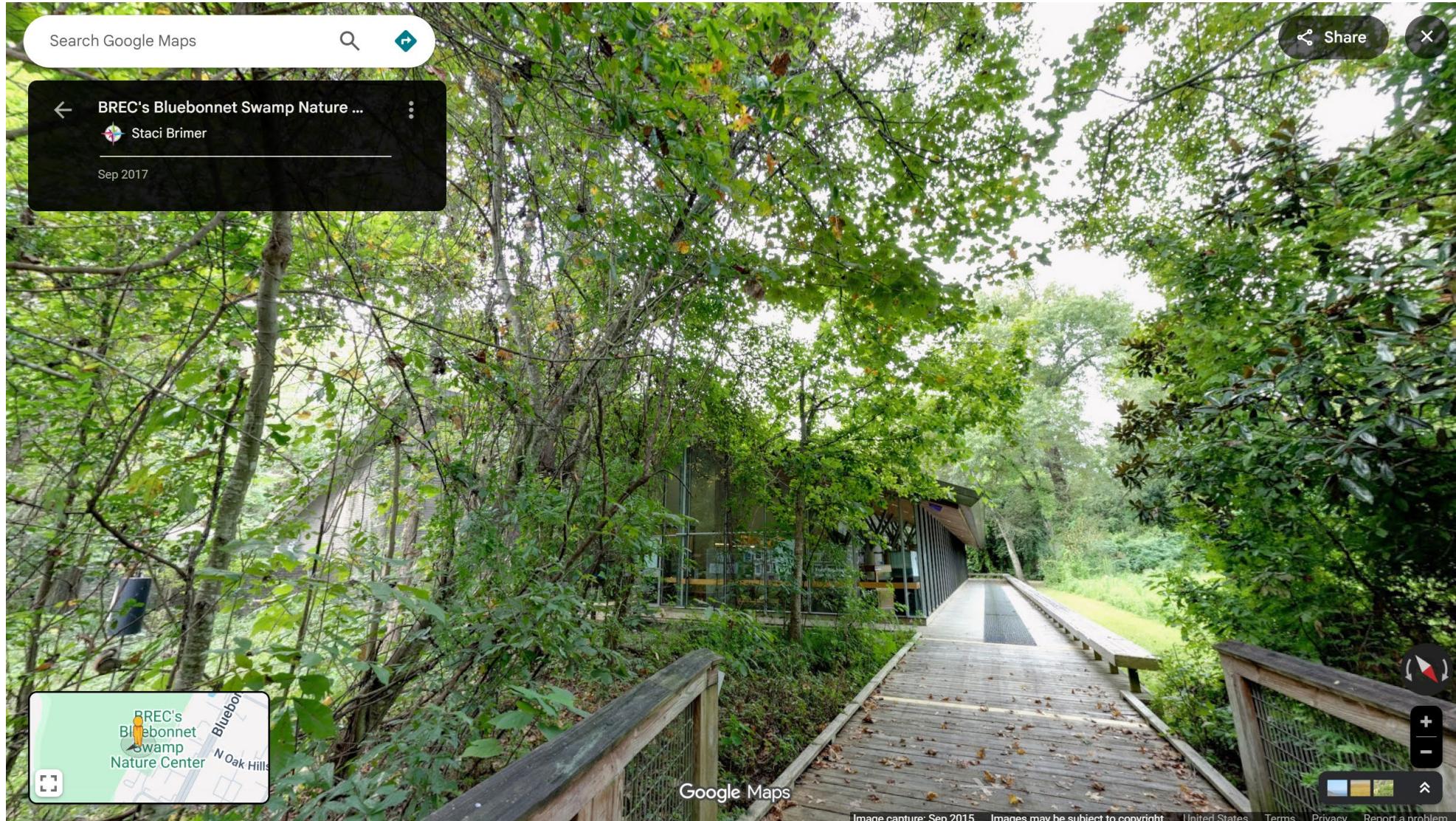
Google Maps

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# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY - I'M NOT SURE IF THIS IS RIGHT



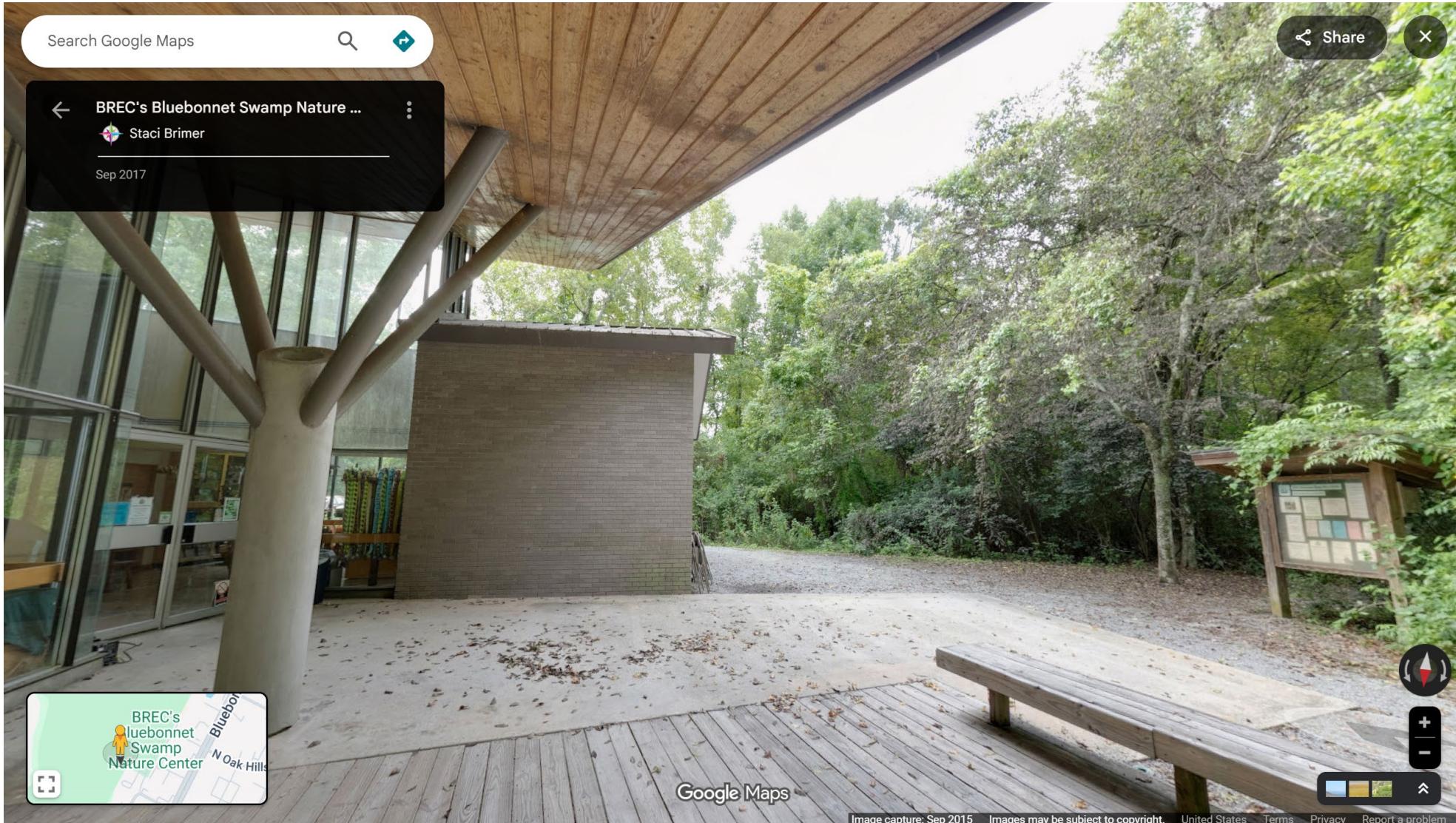
# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY - FINALLY! THERE'S A BUILDING!



# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – WAIT, HOW DO WE GET IN?



# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY - OMG, SOO SALTY RN, FRFR!



Google Maps

Image capture: Sep 2015 Images may be subject to copyright. United States Terms Privacy Report a problem

# CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – AAAANND... ACTION!



- ▶▶▶ Train your team: be prepared; expect the unexpected. Work through different (hypothetical) patron journeys at team meetings.
- ▶▶▶ Have every one of your team members “own” their role in the patron experience.
- ▶▶▶ Practice engaging with sincerity, validation, and affirmation; active listening is critical.
- ▶▶▶ Demonstrate how to give grace, ***as well as*** how to ask for it.
- ▶▶▶ Team training tip – DIY patron journeys!
- ▶▶▶ Your doormat is a red carpet – and everyone is deserving of VIP treatment from hosting staff. **MEET > GREET > SEAT!**



REMEMBER:  
THE PATRON JOURNEY BEGINS *CONTINUES HERE.*



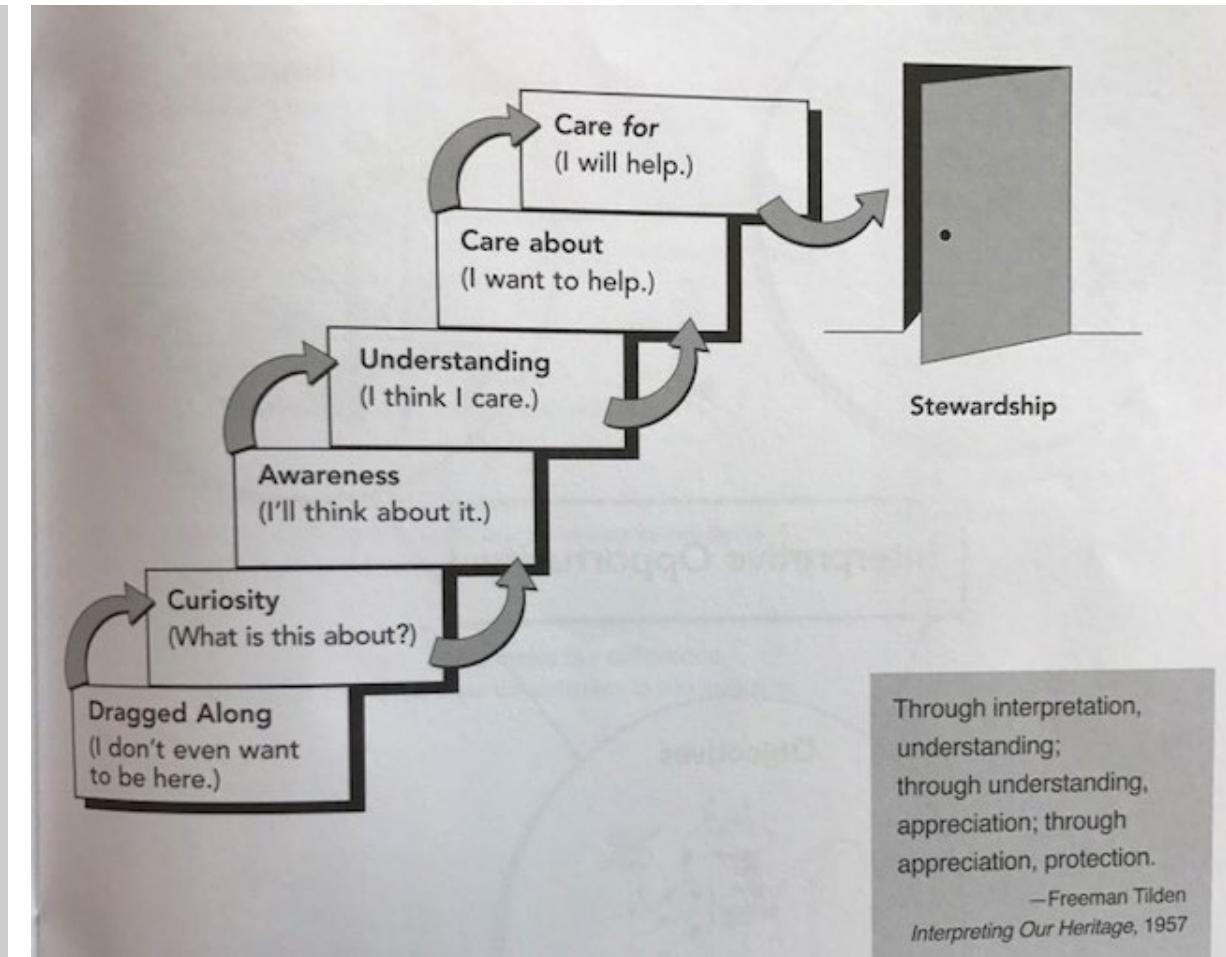
# MEANING-MAKING: INTERPRETIVE PRINCIPLES MAKE LASTING CONNECTIONS



## Six Principles of Interpretation

(Freeman Tilden, 1957, p9)

- If it doesn't relate, it is sterile
- Information is not interpretation. (Rather, it is revelation based upon information.)
- Interpretation is an art. (Any art is teachable)
- The chief aim is provocation (not instruction)
- It should present a whole.
- It should be age appropriate (not a "dilution" of adult material.)



TRAINING & CERTIFICATION FOR PROGRAMMING PROFESSIONALS IS AVAILABLE THROUGH  
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INTERPRETATION / [HTTPS://NAI-US.ORG/](https://nai-us.org/)



# #1 Park System in the Nation

**AWARDED IN 2022!**

# QUESTIONS?



**/BRECPARKS**



**@BREC\_PARKS**



**@BRECPARKS**



**/BRECPARKS**



# LAGNIAPPE: THE PATRON JOURNEY CONTINUES *EVEN AFTER LEAVING!*



- ▶▶ Don't send your patrons away empty-handed!
- ▶▶ When the program, class, tour, site visit, etc. is through, ensure patrons depart feeling appreciated and valued.
- ▶▶ Always invite constructive feedback opportunities on-site and in a follow-up email.
- ▶▶ Invite patrons to return for a next occasion and or sign up as a volunteer.

THE END.

# ENERGY in the Park

Shannon Teamer, CPRP  
Recreation Centers Superintendent

# Why it Matters

- Summer programming is least accessible for the children who need it most
- Parks become direct access points
- Families receive consistent positive experiences close to home



Monday - Thursday  
10 am to 2 pm  
June 23 - August 7  
(ages 5-15)

An orange promotional graphic for a summer program. At the top, the text "ENERGY at the Park" is written in white and green, with a yellow sun icon to the right. Below this, a vertical list of activities is displayed in white text: "Education", "Nutrition", "Exercise", "Recreation", and "Games for Youth". At the bottom, a white box contains the names of four parks: "Hampton Park", "Eastside Park", "Sussman Street Park", and "Woodmere Park". Further down, two bullet points are listed: "\*Registration Required" and "\*Lunch Provided". In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for "A Simple Gesture" featuring a green leaf icon and the company name.

# Operations

- 6 week free program
  - 10:00a-2:00p
  - Weather Permitting
- Registration is required
  - Ages 5-15
- Lunch is served daily



# Focus on Equity



## We analyze:

- Youth density
- Walkability & public transportation
- Median household income
- Food insecurity overlays

# Day-One Programming Strategy

- ✓ Build excitement
- ✓ Build belonging
- ✓ Build consistency
- ✓ Build ownership



# Knowing Your Neighborhood

- Families are often transient due to housing changes
- Community identity shifts frequently
- Program must adapt, not expect community to adjust



# Build Trust with Staff

- High retention = familiarity with children
- Staff are playful and excited → kids mirror that
- Trust creates consistency and safety



# Maximize Park Assets

- "Tree-to-tree challenge course" using rope + chalk
- Field art using natural space
- Park-wide scavenger hunt
- Nature STEM moments



**February 12**  
Bridging Divides  
through Park  
Programming

Sign up for  
our next  
webinar!

Committed  
Cohort

**Stay on the line**  
We will split into  
peer discussion  
groups shortly!

## Programming with Purpose- Session 2 Exit Ticket



## Complete your Exit Ticket!

Clink the link below or the QR code to complete your exit ticket before you log off today:

<https://forms.office.com/r/BYTfwANz4M>