



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.



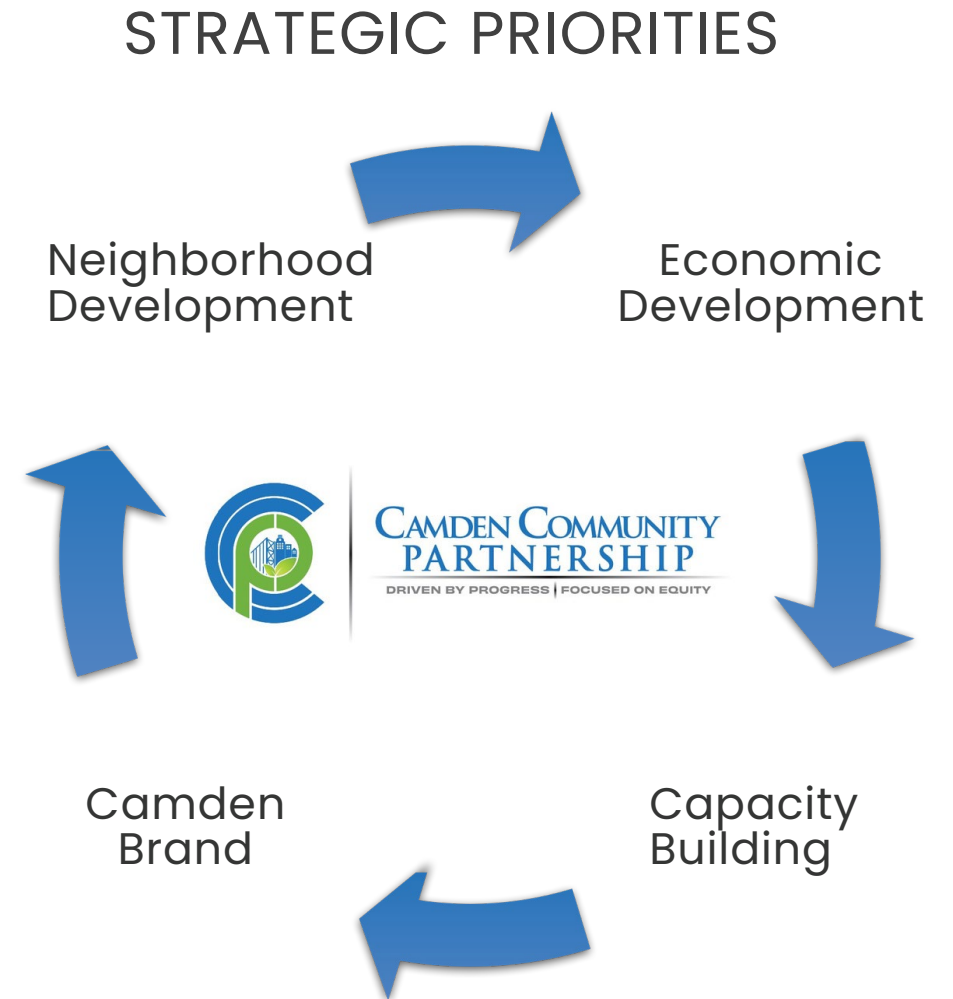
CAMDEN COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIP

DRIVEN BY PROGRESS | FOCUSED ON EQUITY

Hosting an Engaging Program Kickoff

December 11, 2025

<p>Our Mission</p> <p>To serve as the catalyst for the preservation and growth of a vibrant Camden.</p>		
<p>Our Vision</p> <p>Camden is an equitable, thriving city, with high-quality opportunities for individuals, families, and businesses.</p>		
<p><i>Equity</i></p>	<p>Our Values</p> <p><i>Relationships</i></p>	<p><i>Resilience</i></p>
<p>Our How</p> <p>We learn about the issues most pressing to our city, identify potential partners and solutions, and convene the right stakeholders to make change happen.</p>		



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
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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 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.”



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



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

 **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

3,350 ACRES OF
CONSERVATION LAND

6 CONSERVATION
AREAS

 **8** NATURE RESERVES

79 PICKLEBALL COURTS

 **6** DOG PARKS 

UPDATED APRIL 2024

JOURNEY MAPPING BLUEBONNET SWAMP



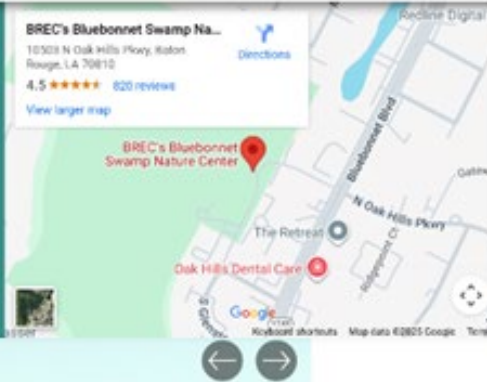
- ▶▶▶ Patron experience begins well before arriving to your door.
- ▶▶▶ What does ***the map to you*** look like? It's not just about roads and traffic lights.
- ▶▶▶ Where does your first impression ***actually*** begin?
- ▶▶▶ Let's start the patron journey to Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, the swamp 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
- ✓ Conservation Area
- ✓ Tourist Attraction
- ✓ Restrooms
- ✓ Nature Trails

- 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 Hills Parkway
Baton Rouge, LA 70810

360° INTERACTIVE VIEW

CONTACT
225-757-8905
swampevents@brec.org

HOURS
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

- Leave a Google Review
- Like us on Facebook
- View Park Improvements
- 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 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

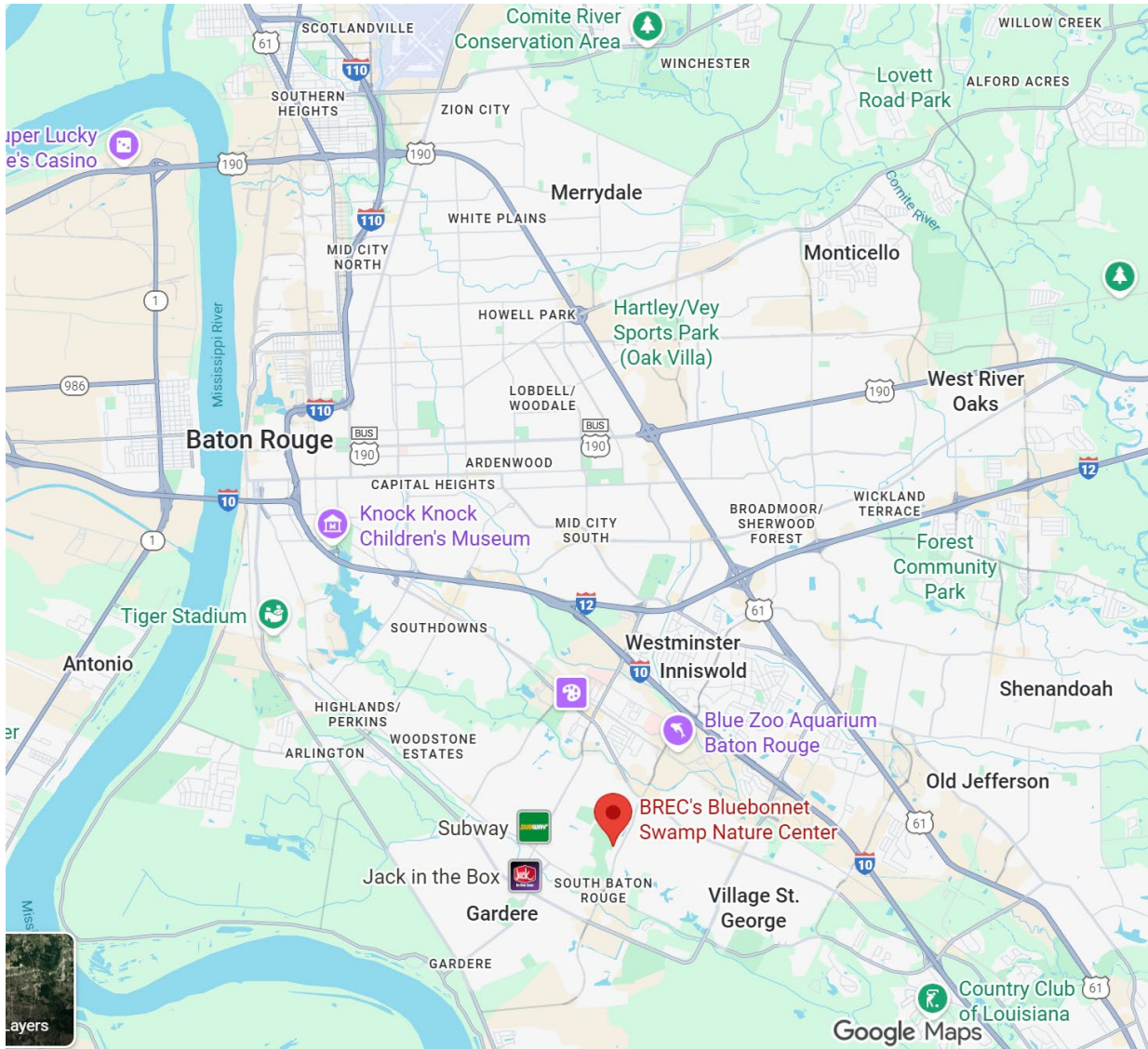
Filters



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

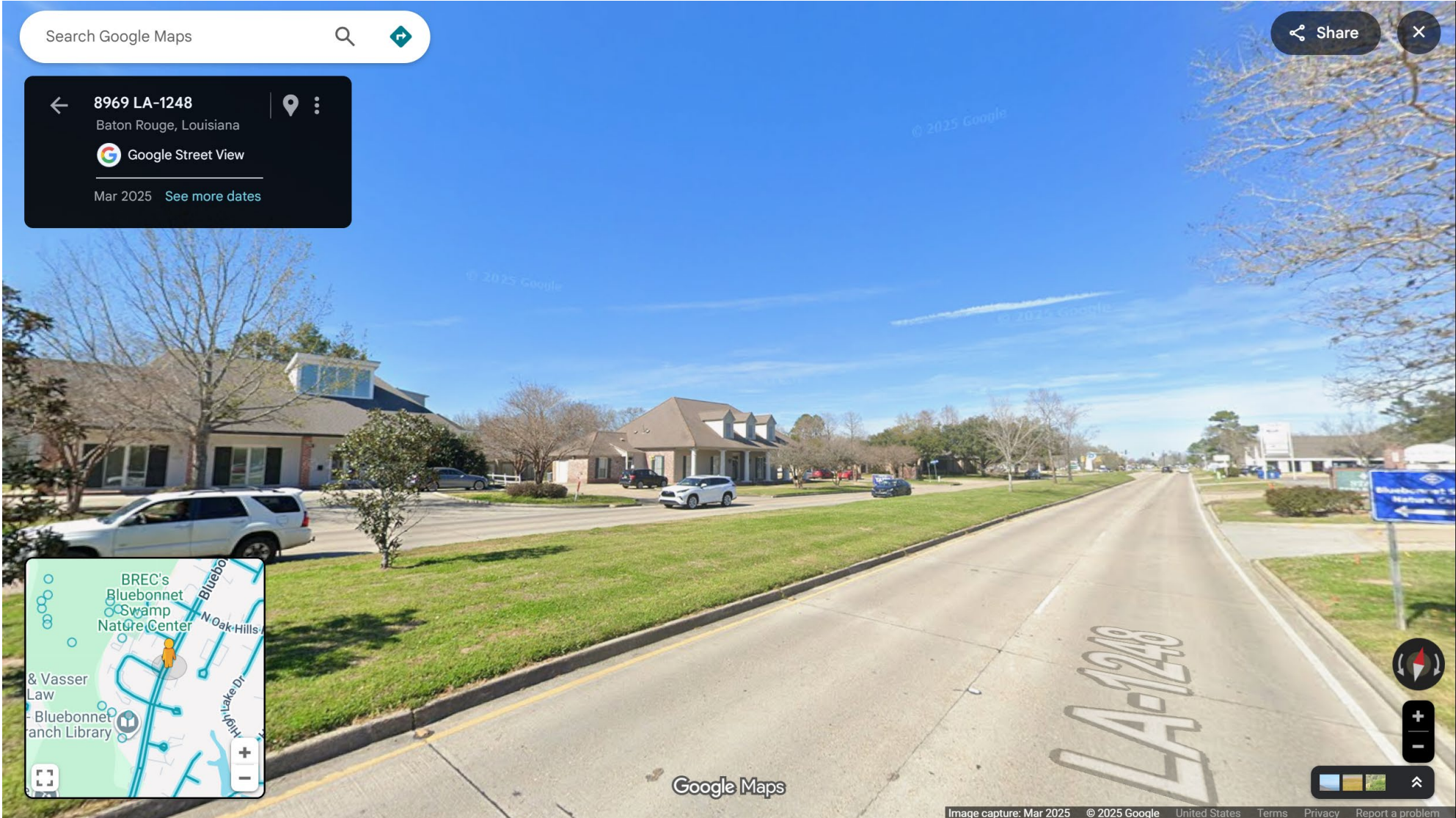
- ▶▶▶ This is the site's current Facebook page.
- ▶▶▶ Impressions?
- ▶▶▶ How do the visual components here compare to your expectations?
- ▶▶▶ Any baggage picked up here?
- ▶▶▶ Anything to note?

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – *ROAD TRIP!*

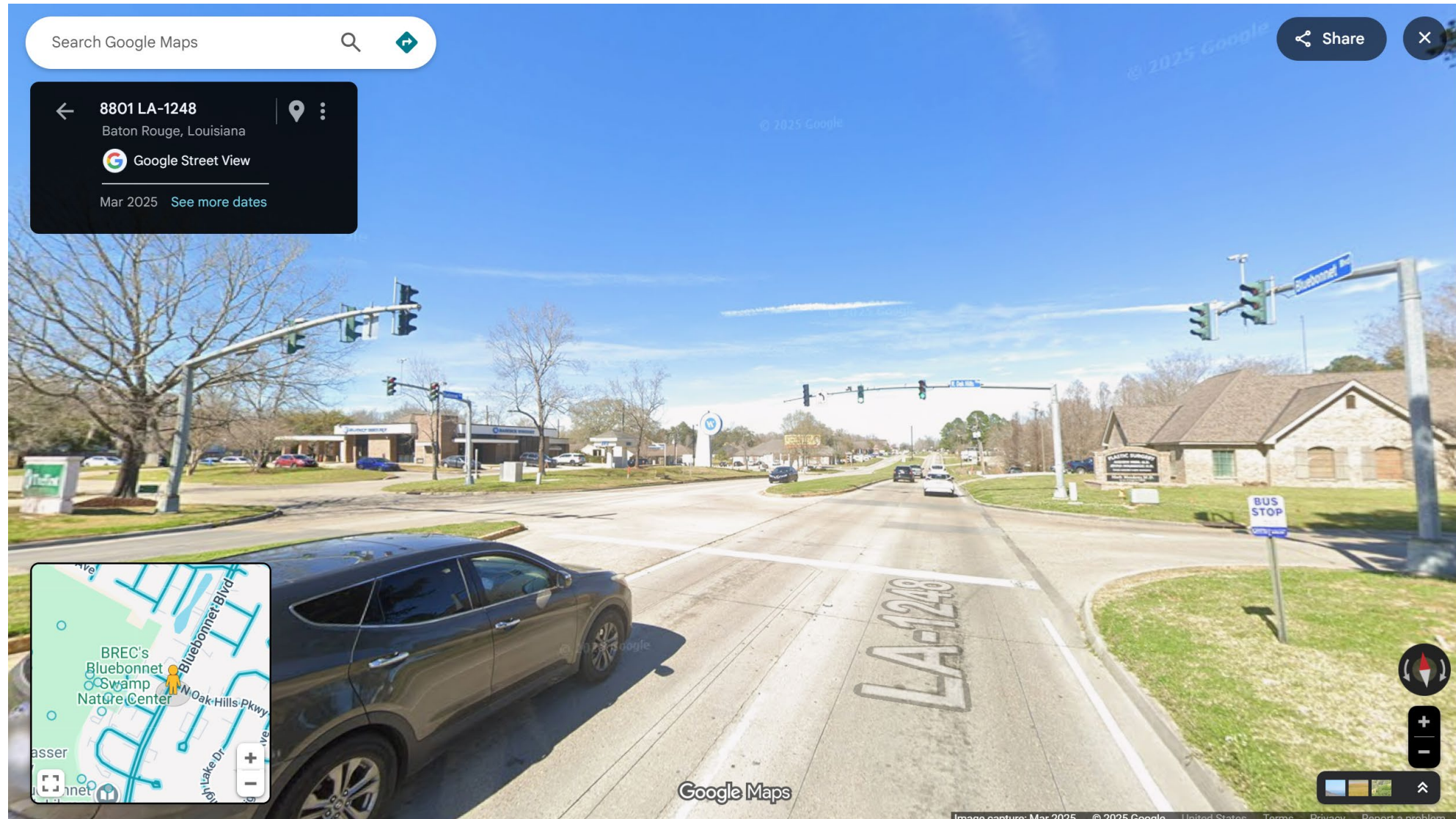


- ▶▶▶ Site conveniently located and accessible via public transportation routes, just minutes from downtown BR and the universities via multiple interstate and highway routes.
- ▶▶▶ LOTS of nearby restaurants, shops, businesses, malls, etc.
- ▶▶▶ High traffic zone, at times (can easily cause unintended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

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY OF EXPECTATION



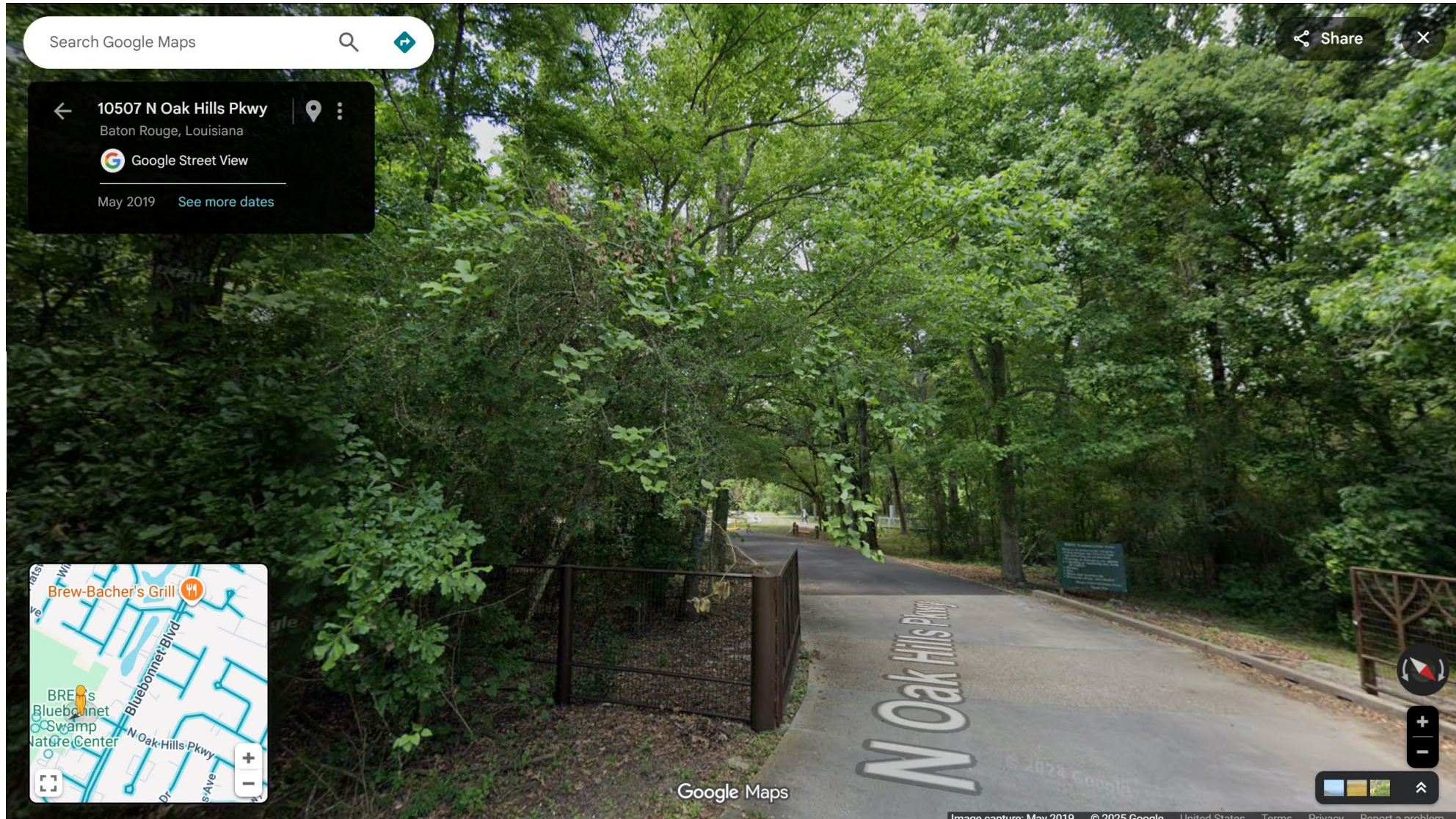
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – WHERE'S THE SIGN?



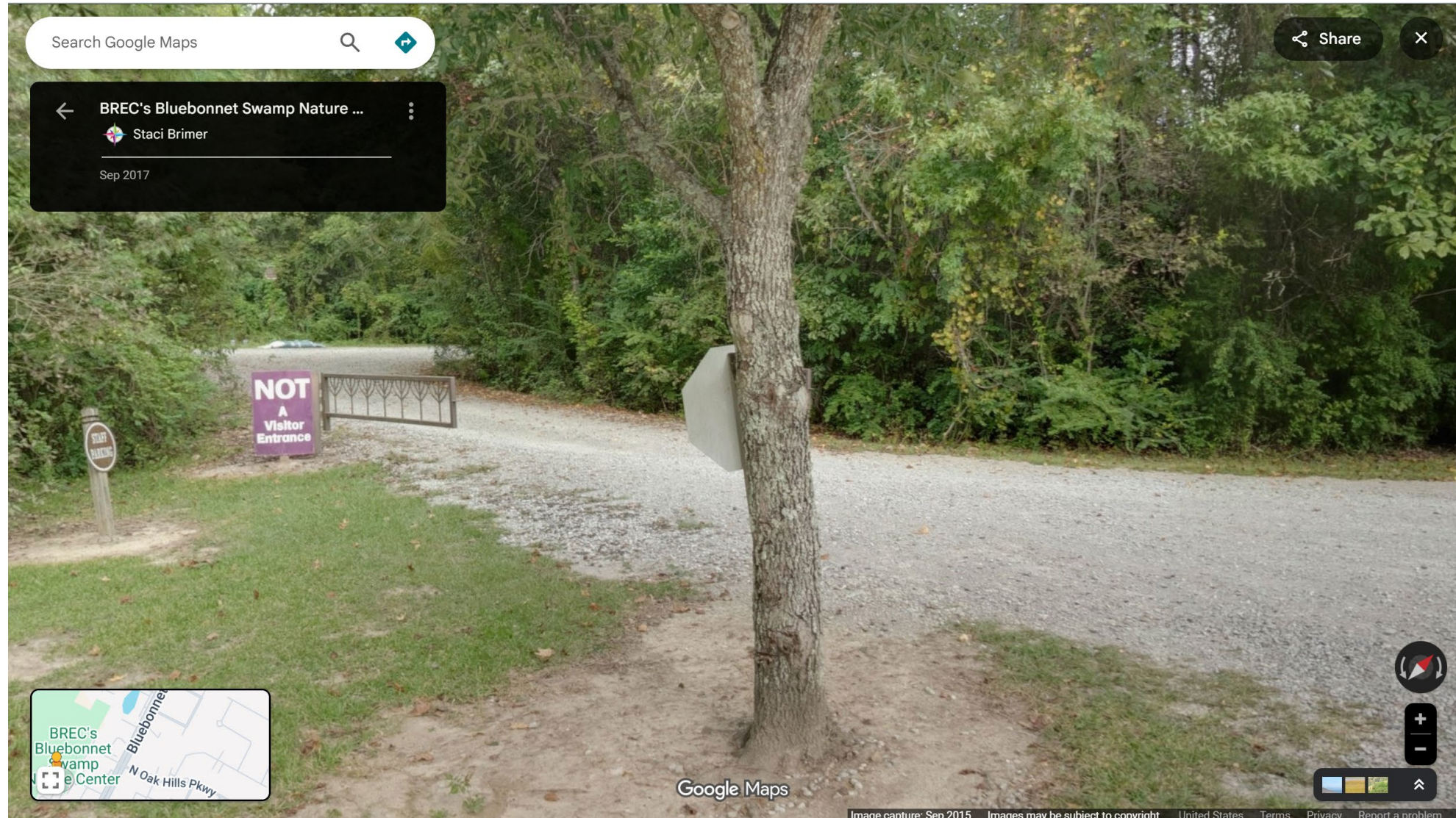
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – ARE WE ON THE RIGHT PATH?



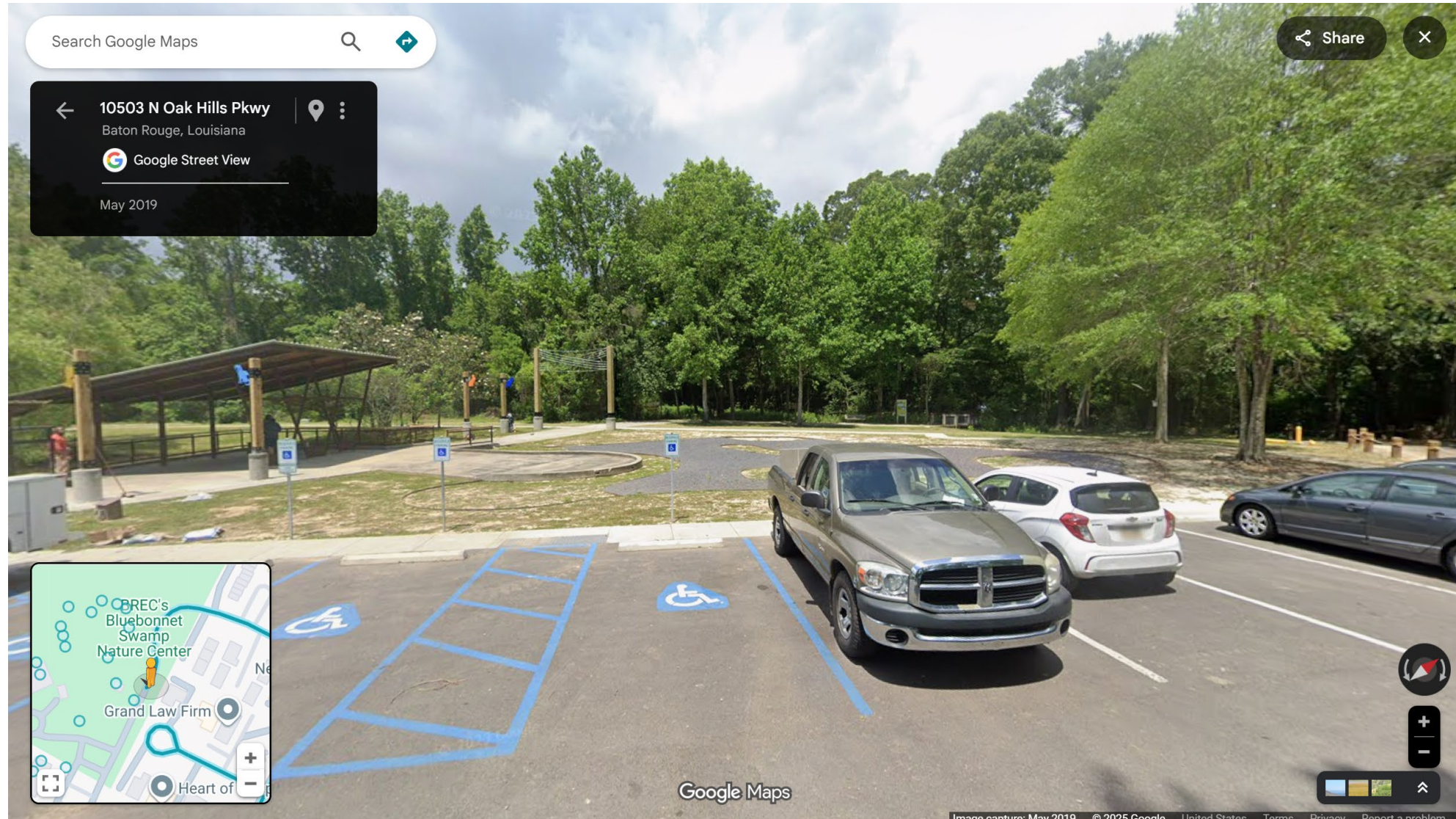
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – ARE WE THERE YET?



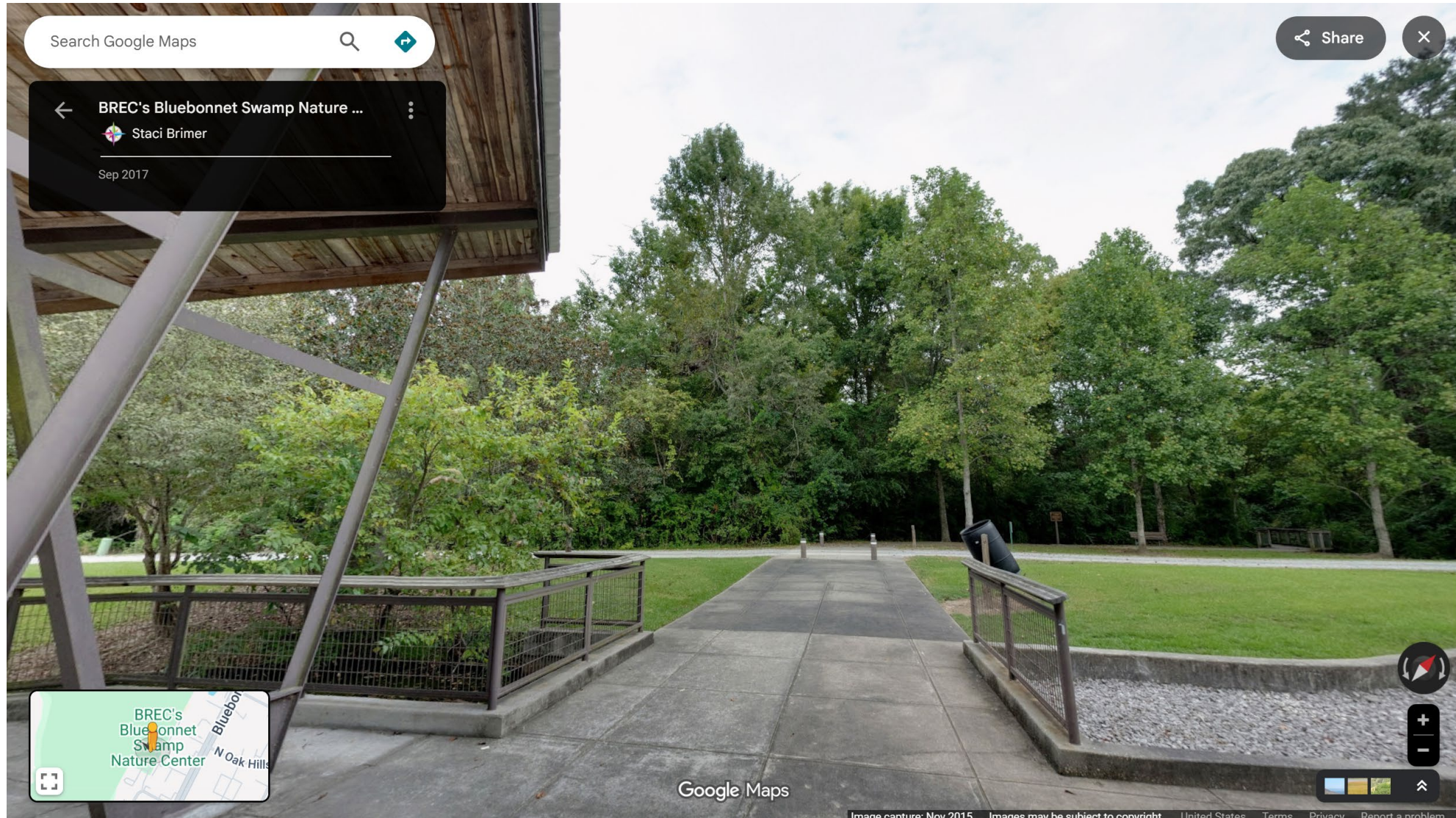
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – WHERE DO WE PARK?



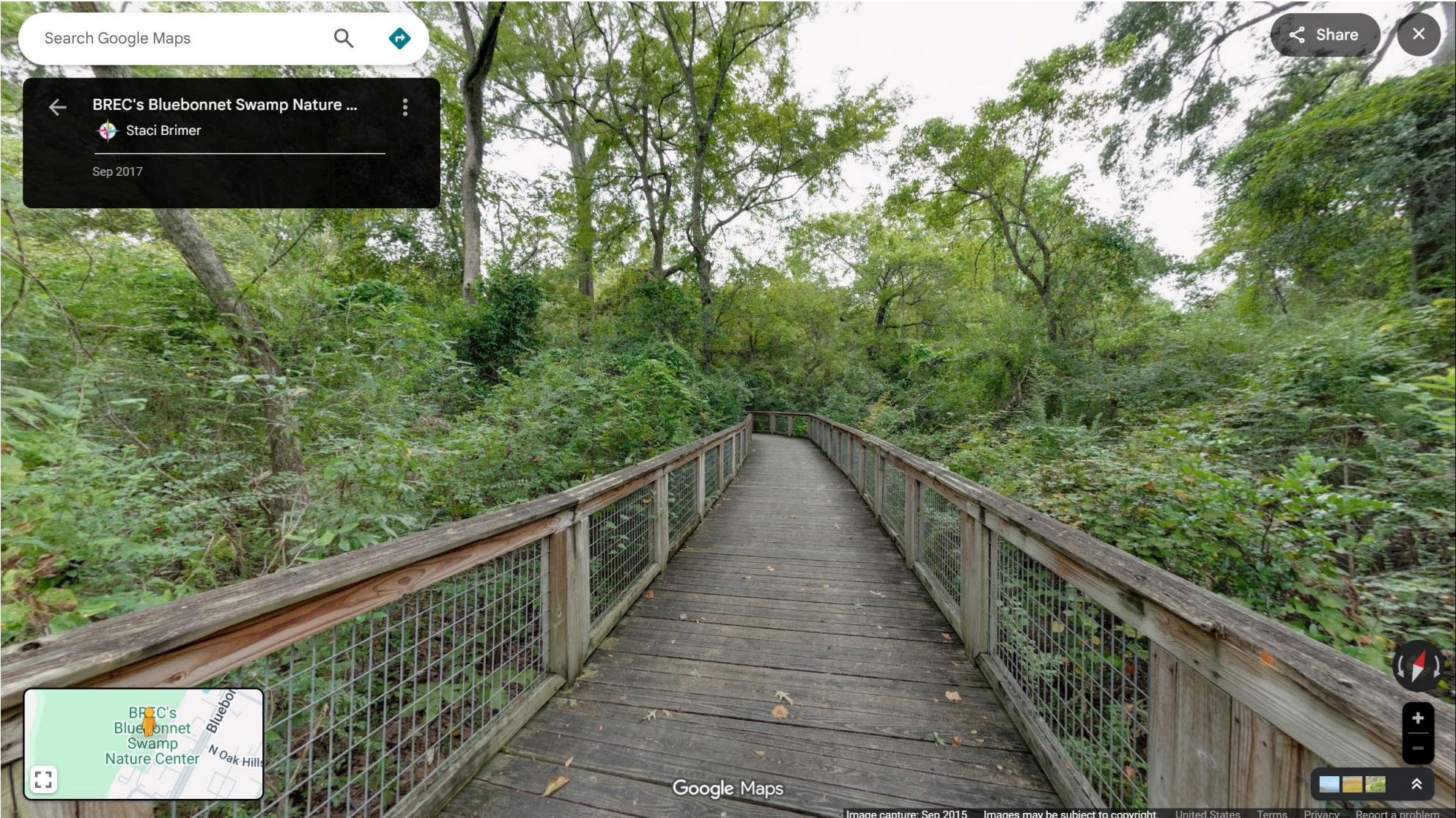
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – PARK HERE; THEN WHAT?



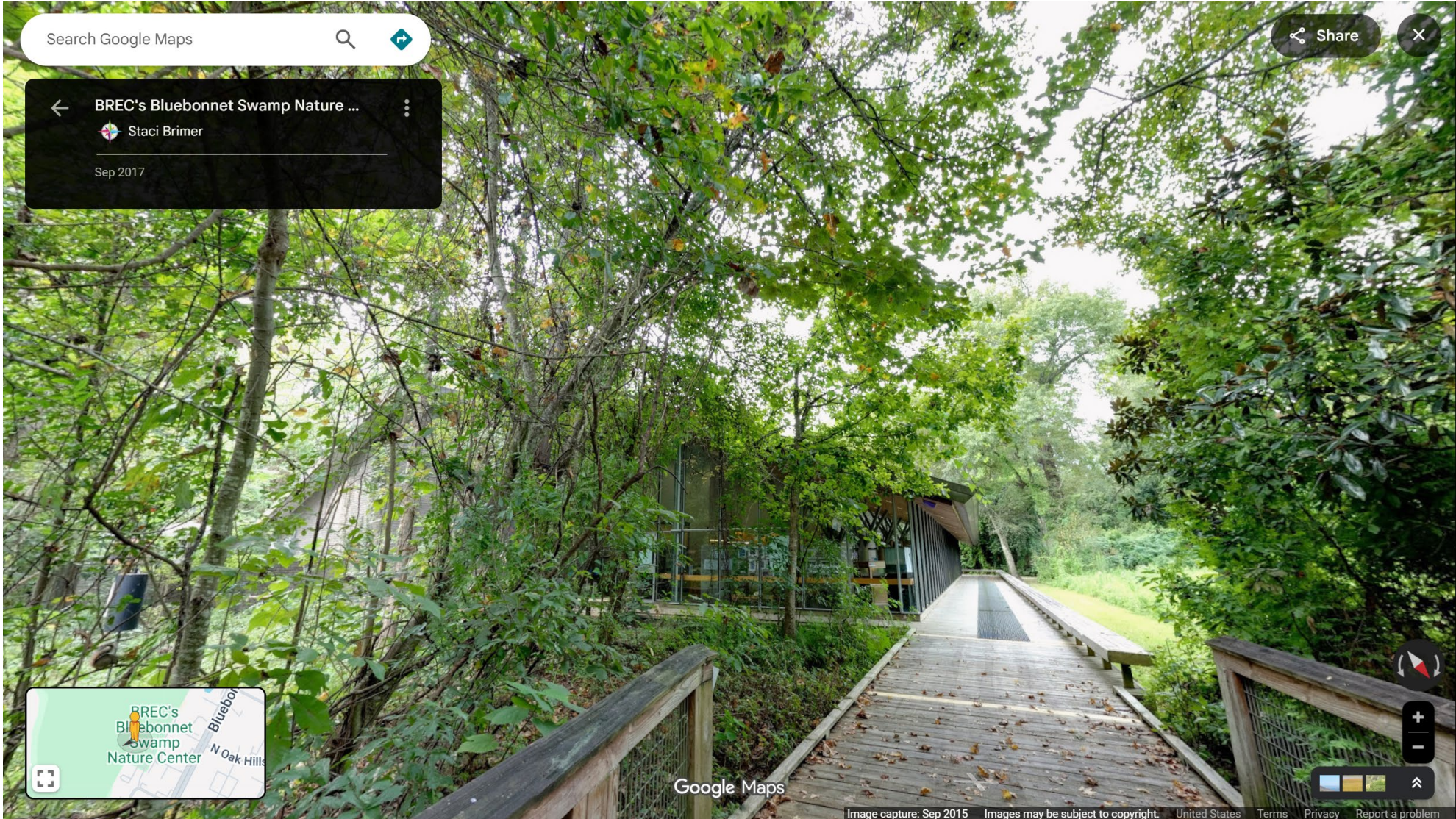
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – DO WE GO THIS WAY???



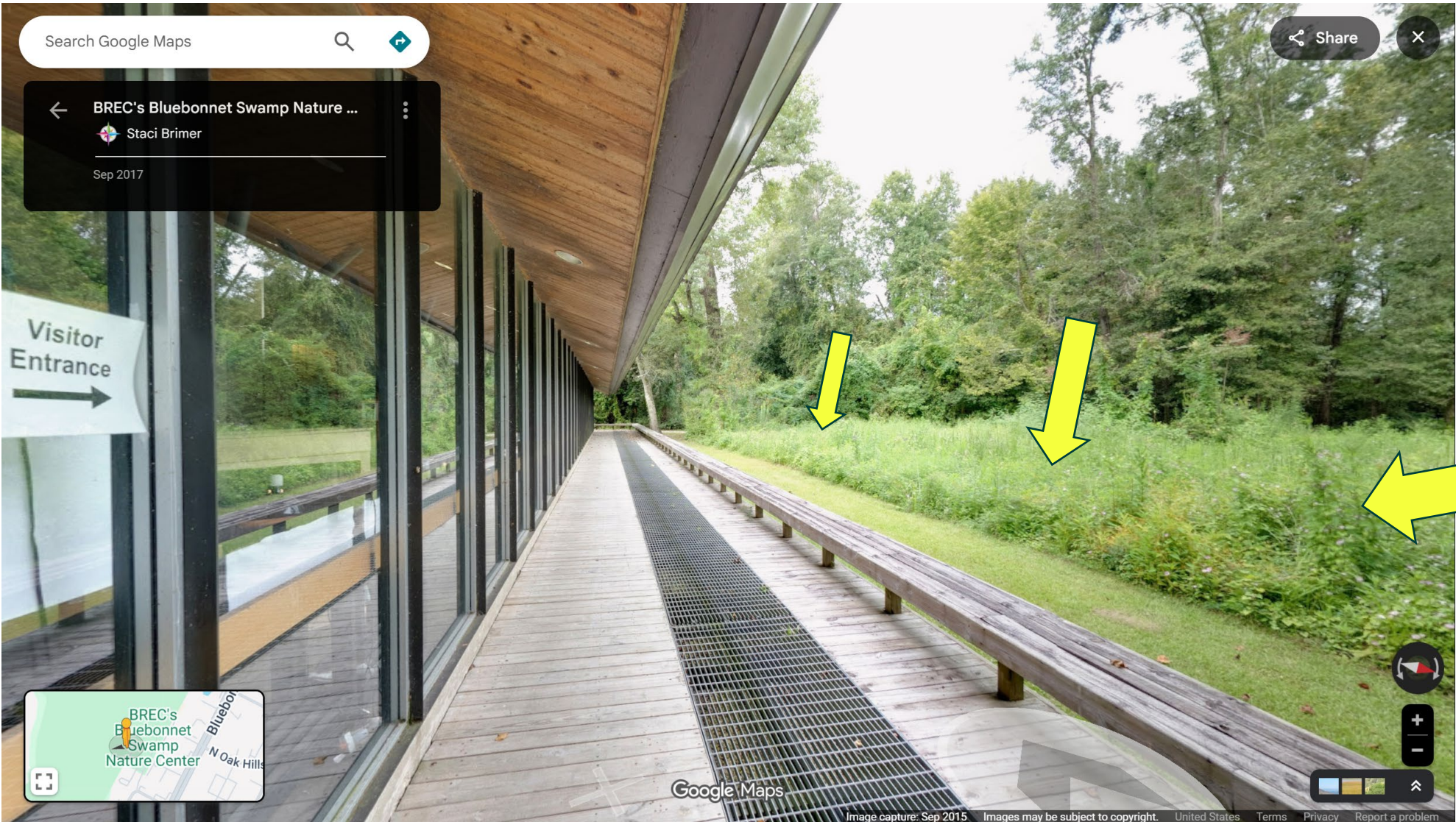
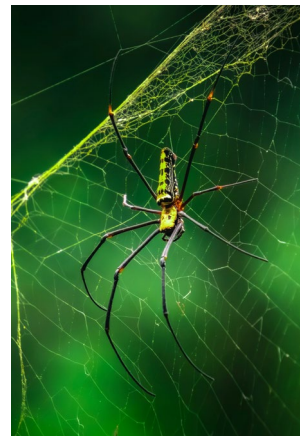
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – I’M NOT SURE IF THIS IS RIGHT



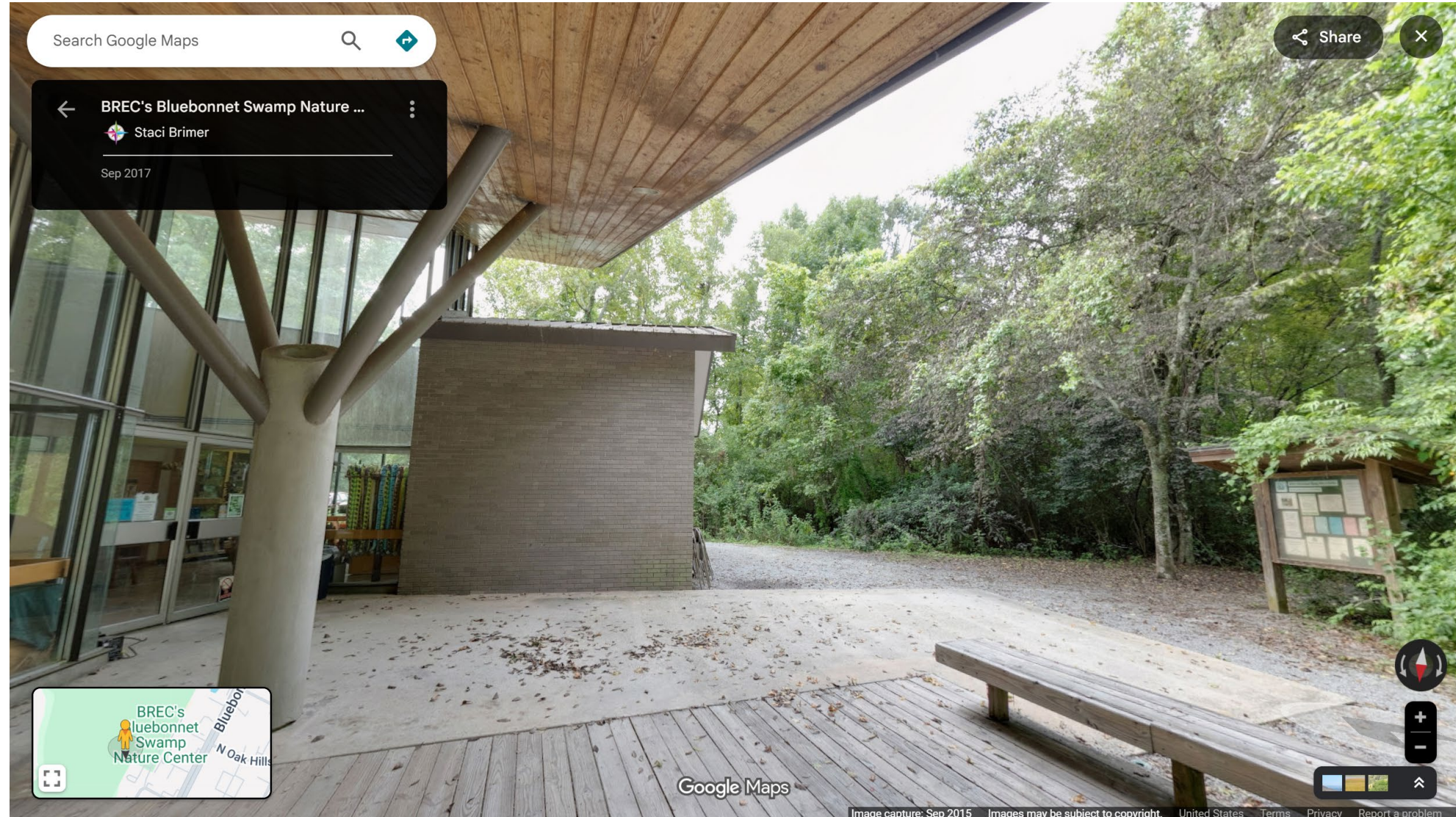
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – FINALLY! THERE’S A BUILDING!



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



CONTINUING THE JOURNEY – OMG, SOO SALTY RN, FRFR!



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.



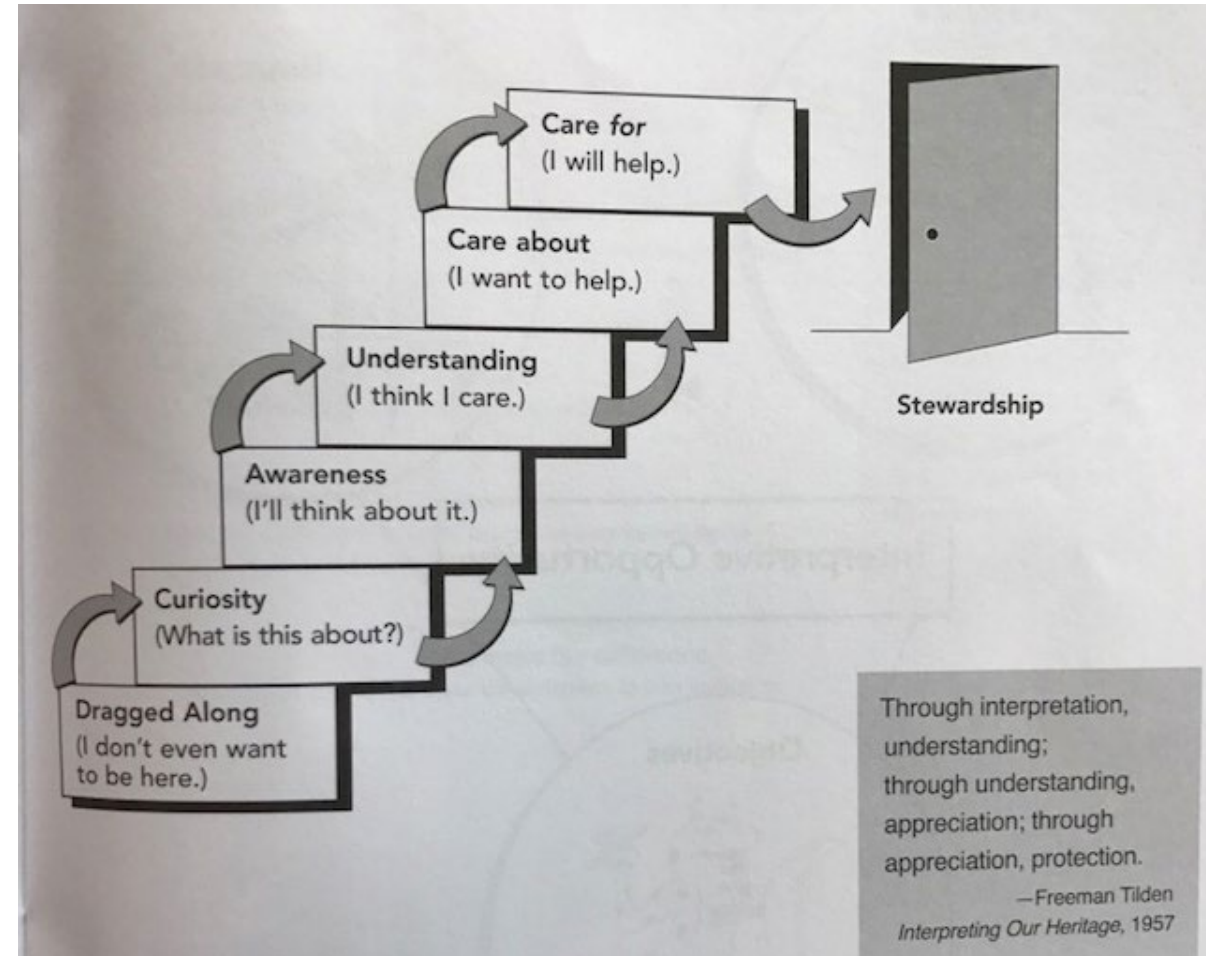
MEANING-MAKING: INTERPRETIVE PRINCIPLES MAKE LASTING CONNECTIONS



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?



/BREC PARKS



@BREC_PARKS



@BREC PARKS



/BREC PARKS





- ▶▶▶ 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)

ENERGY
at the Park

Education
Nutrition
Exercise
Recreation
Games for
Youth

Hampton Park
Eastside Park
Sussman Street Park
Woodmere Park

*Registration Required
*Lunch Provided

A Simple
Gesture

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!

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

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