

Pinellas County Quality Communities Code
Stakeholder Focus Group: Citizens and Civic Associations
October 21, 2010, at 6:00 p.m.

Brian Smith with the Pinellas County Planning Department welcomed the focus group participants and provided an introduction to the Quality Communities Code (QCC) project.

- A participant asked what is the relationship between this QCC project and the Comprehensive Plan? Brian responded that the QCC will implement the plan and defines process developers go through.
- A participant asked what is the projected number of residents over next 30 years? Brian responded there are approximately 930,000 currently in all of Pinellas County, and 270,000 in the unincorporated area. The projected 2035 population is 1,600,000 total. Transit Oriented Development can take pressure off growth into established neighborhoods.
- A participant asked is this like Realty Check? Brian responded no, that was a regional visioning exercise.

Brian then turned the meeting over to Gary Cornell (Jacobs) and left the room. Gary introduced himself and Jennifer Willman (Jacobs) and explained the purpose of the meeting, guidelines, and process. Focus Group members introduced themselves and the discussion followed. The following is a general summary of the questions asked of participants and the comments and responses.

Gary asked the participants to introduce themselves, and share one thing we should talk about tonight.

Comments provided are as follows:

- Lealman needs stimulus badly, it's forgotten between Pinellas Park and St. Petersburg, but has assets like high land, close to highways and the airport; it's not developed, no money being put into area. Would like to see "shopping streets" to support those businesses with people who can walk instead of take cars.
- Ozona is historical, and residents want to keep it like it is. There is a variety of housing now. It's a fishing community that doesn't want a lot of changes.
- Tierra Verde is mostly built out. A couple of developers came in and bought 200 acres, including a shopping center and timeshare that tried to be annexed by St. Petersburg. Legislation was passed to prevent the annexation. It's an eyesore now. There is a lack of mixed-use, condos are 4 stories max., and there is a County park at the end of the peninsula. Residents need to leave the island to do anything.

- Would like to preserve green space and make development youth-friendly.
- Ridgecrest wants to see more housing development.
- Council of North County wanted a traffic light, and established an organization in the process. Residents love Brooker Creek. Some land is available, but residents don't want a shopping center. Keystone was widened, and it's become a donor neighborhood (pay more in taxes than receive in benefits). Residents want to save cookie cutter community, and have traffic control.
- Seminole area has 1,060 houses. It is built out, and is mixed in values of home. Residents would like mixed-use. The hodge-podge of business development is not attractive and needs improvements.
- Dunedin's downtown redevelopment is nice, although it lacks bike racks even though trail goes through town. Residents are interested in public transit, and rail sounds like a good way to go. This County has many different kinds of residences, almost too spread out, becoming so urban that the suburban way of living doesn't seem to fit.
- Residents stopped the concrete channelization of creeks in Pinellas County, stopped the dredging, stopped the incinerator and started recycling. Residents are interested in maintaining quality of life and open space. Interested in Stephenson Creek, septic tanks are still dumping into it. Alliance for Livable Pinellas new group formed mostly about environmental issues.

Gary asked each participant to respect each others' points of view and speak one at a time. Gary posed the following questions in bold, with responses in bullet lists.

What is quality development?

- Space, need parking, need green space, too much building on it.
- There is problem having 24 municipalities, it is very parochial with special interests. East Lake did not want to be part of Oldsmar. Can't tell which town you are in. County needs to operate cohesively, and it needs a transportation plan, and mass transit like Atlanta. Bickering between Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties over the airport and USF needs to stop. The larger challenge is to get people out of cars. Where will the tracks go? CSX?
- Each City retains the right to negate any rule from the County, and requires a double referendum. Not sure if rail will work if we can't get the buses to work. The County will not be homogenous.
- The older population can't take care of large homes. Homes don't need swimming pools when there is a community pool. Need to preserve neighborhoods. It's a problem when an HOA needs 75% of property owners to vote on anything.

- Revenue producing is quality. Residential areas are important, but development needs to bring in tax dollars.
- Quality is the comfort of the people who live there, their happiness, and well being of occupants of commercial buildings, they are tied in as much as a resident is.

On a scale from 1 to 10, has Pinellas County achieved quality development?

- Two responded the County scores a 5 to 6. Another said that's too high.
- This is a central location in Florida, and we couldn't ask for a better area. It must be useful stuff for infill. We don't need a megaplex, but small movie theaters are good. Nice restaurants will draw people without going far distances.
- Make sure development is appropriate to the area. Nothing about Pinellas County is unique throughout all the neighborhoods.
- There are many unsold houses, half-developed lots and vacant commercial developments, so we need to be more careful with development scale to make sure its occupied and not over developed.
- Need help understanding quality development.
- Redevelopment would be the thing since Pinellas is almost built out.
- The County is so vast and diverse. Unique identity is needed, and it's up to communities to establish the style they want like Ozona, East Lake, Lealman – they are trying. Don't make a master plan, but look at each neighborhood and determine if it's appropriate for next 20-50 years.
- In Tierra Verde, developers bought and thought they were getting a good deal but didn't get what they wanted from the County, so they went to St. Petersburg. High end neighborhood doesn't need high end shops (in Tierra Verde).
- Sand Key is losing shops to a hotel in rezoning. 18 acres on an island done right can be mixed-use. They want 8-story buildings and one is a hotel.

What do you think of mixed-use as a concept?

- My concern is controlling it block by block. Chicago must have retail on first floor, but it's vacant. Homework needs to be done up front. Lincoln Park is great. Westchase works. Oldsmar doesn't work because Tampa Rd is flooded with retail. Dunedin works. East Lake wants to keep its preserves, community learning centers.

- Communities need to be protected. With the current annexation laws, unincorporated area will continue to lose land.
- Lealman has a very diverse community, with mostly blue collar workers. There is not a restaurant or clothing store or post office, same as in Tierra Verde. Stores are needed in the local community. Brooklyn-ers shop local, most don't own cars.
- Need plan for each community, Countywide won't work. Agreed. Need comprehensive zoning plan for Countywide so one developer doesn't annex.
- East Lake is not mixed-use and residents wouldn't want McDonalds or a gas station in middle of the neighborhood where the park is. Blocks of residential are needed – it will vary over the County but be similar on each block.
- Community wouldn't want McDonalds in their neighborhood but maybe 4 blocks away. Walking or biking distance is ok, but need separation. Downtown St. Petersburg is a different thing.
- Looking at map, most of Seminole is unincorporated, and most residential is single-family with commercial on main streets – we like that. Need a family feeling.
- Publix took Albertson's location in Seminole, and people liked that. The City of Seminole asked them to annex, but Publix said no. 113th Street and Park Blvd is the central area, not likely to change, they have their own design standards. Annexation is the problem if a property redevelops, then the City will pursue it.
- Culture needs to be integrated. Baseball is not necessarily culture. We have Ruth Eckerd but that's about it. Need to determine what else we need besides shopping centers. Don't need about 1/3 of retail we have, and it will turn into discount centers. They are not going to Marble Slab, they are going to Costco.
- Pinellas Park Mall, Clearwater Mall – they were indoor malls, now big boxes with small boxes around it, how did that happen? Can't walk in the heat, have to drive. Don't want to get killed by car – need a pathway with trees to walk from store to store.
- Seminole Mall brought in fresh produce in the mall, outdoor food vendors, arts and crafts. Green grocer concept is happening.
- Largo Mall is more successful – drive up layout, outdoor mall.
- The Rouse Company built Columbia, and is a good example to look at it. It is centered on the mall with neighborhoods on periphery, and was master planned.

Looking at the image boards, are all these housing choices available in the County?

- Townhouse and single-family are here. Developers make more money with townhouses. Unincorporated County is a suburban type lifestyle but don't want apartments over stores. Want to maintain space in communities, need room to park cars for guests.
- There are more affordable housing options now due to foreclosures. In the past, mobile home parks were redeveloped for townhomes. How does a person making \$25-40,000 year have a quality house? In San Francisco, you can see a mix of residential and commercial, restaurants and grocery.
- The County needs to get control over the annexation issue. There needs to be a master plan for 20-30 acres but it needs green space, mixed-use, and a variety of housing.
- Where do we see ourselves when we are 60 years old? Parents are stuck in a house in Countryside. There is no bus in Countryside. It depends on where we came from, it's a mindset. Teenagers could walk and ride bikes.
- Top of the World – don't need more of those, but some are necessary. Can handle it a different way. Some communities have smaller buses.
- Property tax bill itemized list for Tierra Verde – library tax, PSTA tax – but we don't have a library or a bus stop. Pay taxes and get nothing in return, partly the County not doing their job.
- Want good lighting – County doesn't have streetlights. 130 year neighborhood - old sidewalks and streetlights, if you want those, move to a subdivision.
- County can identify areas and set boundaries and evaluate the land use and determine redevelopment opportunities. Make those areas like cities and cannot be annexed. Maybe redraw community boundaries. Should a particular type of development be in particular area.
- Annexation law is set by State, and the County can't control it. Accommodate built out cities, when County hits 90% developed then all enclaves are absorbed by County.
- Does Amendment 4 affect the Land Development Code? Jennifer Willman responded no since Amendment 4 affects amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, and the Land Development Code implements the Comprehensive Plan as it is adopted.
- Without a clear understanding of what will, and what will not be annexed, this is an exercise in futility. St. Petersburg came in with a restaurant and hotel in middle of Lealman, used I-275 corridor to take it.

What do you think about Transit Oriented Development?

- Youth want a rail system and places for them to live, they want Transit Oriented Development (TOD), high density development, lofts, and upscale places. We need that to get youth to come back.
- MARTA in Atlanta came in from the ground up. Metro in DC, where stops are located is where density will occur.
- On Ulmerton Road near Feather Sound, there are upscale apartments near the bridge to Tampa. People might live in St. Petersburg over Tampa or Orlando.
- Hotel workers must live far out and get bussed in. TOD will out-price people who need reasonably priced homes. TOD is good 5-6 stories tall and high density.
- Need jobs. Pinellas County is working on it. Need a place for people to live. Need quality jobs for the middle class.

What needs to be in the QCC?

- Planning for retired people or young working people – median age is going down. Hispanic population is bringing the age down.

Has anyone been to a public hearing, like for a Zoning action?

- When we need to address something, we have to go all the way Downtown. It's too far, especially when some County offices are closer. We need more interaction. We want the County to come to the neighborhood.

What do you think about green building and low impact development?

- Green building is a huge movement for youth. Tax credits and incentives important, as well as green space and nature.
- Be careful though because people are using turf like grass and rocks. Can't do Xeriscape in East Lake.
- Interesting to look at alternatives. Pinellas trail is fantastic – it preserves nature and attracts people, parks are great.
- Some HOAs can't put out clotheslines. I don't like to be told what to do. My house has no grass. The yard is covered with landscape cloth and plantings.

- In the Unincorporated areas, you can do what you want, be on well water, park boats.
- In defense of HOAs, the Tierra Verde Community Association is a de facto government. When County Code Enforcement won't take care of it, the Association does. It is 35% condos, and the rest single-family.

A participant asked Gary to summarize the consensus of the group, and he did so as follows.

- Most agreed specific areas need master plans, since there not one solution, and each plan need to be appropriate for each area. However, we won't be able to accomplish that under this scope of work, but we will pass this information along.
- Master planned areas become annexation magnets that need to be protected too.
- Alternative forms of development living over the shops might be good in certain locations but not in single-family neighborhoods.

Gary thanked the participants for their input and announced there will be two more focus group meetings, in May and November next year. There will be a draft zoning portion to discuss in May, and a final draft of the complete QCC in November. A summary of this meeting will be sent out to the participants, and if there are things you want to comment on, please let contact Liz Freeman.