

**Pinellas County Quality Communities Code
Stakeholder Focus Group: Real Estate and Redevelopment
October 21, 2010, at 2:00 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. 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.

A participant asked will the Code be rewritten from scratch? Gary responded yes and no, some parts are working fine, so those will be left alone.

Gary asked the participants to introduce themselves and share a specific topic that is important to talk about today.

Comments provided are as follows:

- Realtor – wants to look at the larger perspective and transit. There is a problem with many cities and multiple regulations. Does it make sense for the County to have separate set of codes, or should they adopt those that reflect other municipalities?
- Real estate broker – no additional comments.
- Developer – old communities like Safety Harbor and downtown Clearwater are attractive, also Arlington, VA and DC.
- Developer – regulatory relief is needed, and an easier permitting process. Something needs to happen with this so it is not a waste of time participating in this process.
- Architect – need better reputation for being innovative and progressive.
- Public sector work, schools, assisted living – need smarter growth and Transit Oriented Development (TOD) within bigger pieces of puzzle that is sprawl – need cohesion. Promote green buildings, denser development.
- Real estate agent – need new buyers and people moving in. Continuity is needed among municipalities in terms of the built environment.

A participant asked if we have looked at Pinellas By Design, and if not we need to.

A participant asked why are we are looking at zoning when the comprehensive land use plan needs to be determined? Gary responded that that it has been already been adopted as official County policy, so our job is to implement the Comprehensive Plan in drafting a new QCC.

A participant asked if these notes be posted online on blog? Gary responded that the notes will be available for review and feedback, if anything in the notes need to be clarified.

Gary explained that we will look for the consensus of the group. He 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?

- Needs to make good business and economic sense, good sense with planning, good design and good architecture, all 3. The first 2 are easy, but from the planning perspective, when planning is solved, the momentum is lost. This area not known for its architecture. Momentum is exhausted by planning, and we are too tired to do good architecture. One change to make quality development would be to integrate the architect further up front and not wait until the civil engineer is done.
- It doesn't make sense why the process is set up to need planning approval first, and site design isn't in the application to begin with, and a zoning change isn't accompanied with architecture.
- To have everything ready including architecture when plan is presented is too costly, you can spend \$75,000 before you get any approvals. Clearwater has that problem – they say it is to make it easy for the developer when he/she goes to Council.
- Nobody should care how big the sewer pipe is. We can figure that out later. Need good concept first.
- County is straightforward with administrative site plan approval.
- Site plan is predictable here.

What are the ingredients of quality development?

- You know it when you see it. Good green development. Not plaster and concrete and that's it. Something pleasing to the eye is needed. County developed with subdivisions and small lots, and now redevelopment is needed and the process needs to be made easier.
- Development should be occurring around better mass transit like Portland, Oregon, where you can take light rail from the airport, there is development along the rail line that is accessible and easy to navigate as an outsider. We don't have that ease of movement here right now. There is a proposed transit tax in Hillsborough and a task force studying it here in Pinellas, we need that here.

- People have different opinions. Some like homes and neighborhoods the way they are. Environment is designed for people, people feel good – that is quality development. Barriers make it difficult to get from Point A to Point B.
- Pinellas is beautiful, with natural assets, green, parks, and climate – these contribute to quality of life.
- A quality environment should be oriented to people. Here the closest store is not walkable.
- If you live in Pinellas County near Tarpon Springs, then you feel like I live in Tarpon Springs – where there is a community focus.
- If each City had a sphere of influence then we wouldn't need County Ordinance due to extraterritorial domain.
- We don't need the County except for taxes. Everyone likes to hold onto jurisdictions. If we can look at what the other adjacent community is doing, and decide what should happen there next to it.
- All neighborhoods were built at different times, with different road patterns, why have another stand alone plan? There is no cohesive process.

How is redevelopment different than greenfield development?

- It is the easiest to get something done in County than in the cities. It would be easier to have one County planning, and it would be more uniform.
- Not necessarily the Code requirements, but it's the culture of the planners and how they treat the developer. The planners can make it go smooth or not smooth. The process is often not friendly. The County is more friendly than some cities.
- It is flat here. When an old warehouse is redeveloped it needs to be raised up, using a lot of concrete (3-4000 feet), but it sometimes costs more to permit than pour concrete, and takes a long time (3-4 months) especially having to get SWFWMD approvals too.
- There is a disconnect between the Planning Department and the Economic Development Department. Planners work within the box, and there is no flexibility with the Codes.
- An Economic Development Department cohort needs to massage it along, and understand the impact.
- No concept of cost is involved. Clearwater asks for too many copies of plans submitted.
- Master plan is needed – why can't there be consistency in quality – green, sidewalks, underground utilities.

- St. Petersburg simplified to a few Future Land Use categories. We need to simplify the process.
- County reviewers check for compliance with Code, but this is a duplication of efforts when professional engineers and architects are insured and licensed, and don't need to be checked. What is value of review process?
- The way it was 30 years ago, we didn't need someone to set jurisdictional boundaries. Every rule has been codified.
- There is a lot of bureaucracy. Seems like there can be electronic records, and a database of properties.
- Community is concerned with character. They care what it looks like, but they don't care about the rest of it. We just need a range to operate in design work. County is not really protecting the public. Professionals meet the Code. Reviewers apply their interpretation and slow down the process.
- Community voices will be different so it might be hard to make decisions about what it looks like. Do the reviewers determine the character including paint color? St. Petersburg sees good development and helps it get built, they work with you – this is different than other municipalities.

What are your thoughts about Low Impact Development (LID) or green practices?

- Progressive and innovative still needs to happen here.
- Green doesn't cost any more now. The industry changing, the mystique is over with. Planning and development will get everyone back to work. If it is integrated with transit, then you've got something. Portland didn't suffer same recession because it is transit and bike oriented. If we get out of the recession, then we need to embrace better transportation and be energy efficient.
- Developments should be required to have quality of place. Green building should be high performing, use less energy and water, and smaller parking lots, more grass areas, stormwater integrated into the site and not a big pond in back – doesn't look like stormwater – need incentives to do it.
- Portland and Minneapolis have progressive green building incentives. Pinellas just built an emergency operations center, schools, and office buildings. It is starting to come along, but not like Westshore in Tampa. Some local cities have a green building ordinance, fast tracking, and reduced building fees. Less stormwater released should get reduced impact fee. Portland has a "fee-bate" that you pay if the building is not green certified. The fee is equal to cost premium to build to LEED standard. If you build to Silver then you pay no fee, if you build to Gold then you get money back. We can start taking steps to that. Many cities have green standards.

Can the requirement be something other than LEED?

- Yes. Green building or energy star, or something comprehensive.
- Don't require green building – market will drive that, take care of it. Price of water and energy are high enough, it makes sense without being incentivized.
- Provide incentives to build green like fast tracking. The County should be a role model.
- Looking at the images of LID and Green Building, all the images are of public spaces, but I don't think they need to be public improvements.
- St. Petersburg is in line with other places. If Pinellas County would adopt St. Petersburg Codes, then others would follow and we would have one Code ideally. St. Petersburg is transit oriented. Some things in there aren't the greatest, but 26 diff sets of Codes are too cumbersome.
- The Administrative culture is more important than what is in the Code. Clearwater makes it difficult to do business. Unincorporated Count is great in terms of culture.
- I don't know when I am in the unincorporated area and not, so it's hard for me to tell if development is ok in Pinellas when I don't know where I am.
- Unincorporated County is doing better – and it's more predictable – than Clearwater and Largo.

Do we need mixed-use development in new development and in redevelopment?

- Mixed use is just another use. Land use is an archaic concept and doesn't determine impact.
- Compatibility issues are performance based, not land use based, and characteristics can change over time.
- Impacts of a medtech building is no different than office – it has no pollution – why can't it be permitted in a retail center?
- If the impact of retail is compatible with residential multi-family, those uses should be put together. They are compatible, and the market doesn't have a problem with it. People don't care.
- Agreed – let the market dictate.

Where doesn't mixed-use fit?

- Mobile home parks.
- Large sites need to be mixed-use developments, with increased density and tax base. Infrastructure is already there.

- Can someone build a factory or a duplex next to single family? No, it must be compatible.
- Park Place is one of the best places – it's all there in the other Downtown Clearwater.
- Why is there no mixed-use in Pinellas County? It's in the DRIs but took too long.
- Could there be a house on top of a storefront? The City of Largo West Bay is a hard sell, Indian Rocks Beach maybe a problem with the stores there. Downtown St. Petersburg is successful with amenities there, density, and it has transit, don't have to get in the car to do everything. Mixed-use would be more sellable if it's on good transit line.
- St. Petersburg has natural amenities, waterfront, and mixed-use is different since there is culture too.
- Need clusters like in Milwaukee. Need retail close to school, or where you already have a focus in your community. In Dunedin and Safety Harbor downtowns it makes sense.
- Can't just put it anywhere – need amenities there too. Parts of unincorporated Pinellas, like Downtown Palm Harbor is conducive to mixed-use. Mixed-use wasn't allowed in Palm Harbor, and Florida Avenue couldn't go to 3 stories – needed that to make the deal work.

Would mixed-use in a quadrant of an intersection on US 19 work?

- Can it be tall? 8 stories, down to 3 near existing 1-story buildings.
- We're dense but spread out. The old stuff is good. Need more than a school.
- New stuff can work like Fishhawk Ranch Town Center. Westlake Village in Westchase is also good.
- What societal focal point or center is there and how to grow on that? US 19 and Klosterman is a good place – Innisbrook, park, retail, etc. could be enough of a concentration. St. Petersburg College might work. Or create whole thing like in Fishhawk, but there needs to be something to start with.
- The Mobile Home Bay Pines 80-acre site has great potential. Belcher and Gulf to Bay. 300 units were scraped and approved for 280 apartments, 1000k retail – 1 large grocery.
- Mobile homes are largest tracts available, but need a land use amendment and zoning change to make it more accessible to developers.
- Create TOD overlay and have rights to do certain types of development. Drop those into particular areas where the rail lines are to create some community focal point. Concentrate development around a community asset like a community college.
- Is transit a positive? Yes, that philosophy has changed.

- Concentrated development is there, but need to leave everyone else alone. St Petersburg focuses on corridors and maintaining the character of individual neighborhoods. Corridors have opportunities for redevelopment. Neighborhoods gave their approval.
- Citizen involvement needs to be positive, and part of plan from beginning. That process will help create regulations, know what we're dealing with, then the decision making process is done.

What makes a walkable community, and is parking in the rear or other features good ideas?

- Don't lock that in, it was used detrimentally in City of Clearwater. Emergency vehicles can't get to the hospital certain times of the day when parking is up against the sidewalk, some green space is needed.
- US 19 between Klosterman and Alderman is 6 lanes going fast – why would we want buildings up against that?
- Putting in the overpasses helps.

What do you think about inter-parcel connecting access?

- It's good in communities that are built from scratch, but major arterials make it hard. A lot of the development are lots 250 to 300 feet deep, with residential behind it.
- Should we take the fences down? While it's practical will it be difficult to implement it. It is forced now for new parcels. Driveways don't line up. Is topography an issue? There are advantages to shoppers having rear roads connect, keeps them off the main road.
- Cross easements, can work through those legal issues. It is done successfully in some places, and the developer will do that if it makes sense.

Is Pinellas County user-friendly?

- Yes. They are friendly.
- The Code is inflexible. Look at Pinellas By Design. Citizens and business people developed it. Attracting the right jobs is important. There was buy-in from the cities, but nothing happened.
- The County will need advocates or the regulations won't mean much – they need to help try to get a project to work. In St. Petersburg, there are more problems in building than in planning, not all good. Think about the mindset that will bring businesses here, and there can't be too many challenges.
- I would like certain Codes to be eliminated, like the Tree Ordinance. Most of us have gone through this a couple times, put in a lot of effort, in other municipalities and the County, but nothing really

comes of it. Some consistency would be really helpful, especially if we can just adopt St. Petersburg's Code. Their staff is wonderful to work with, and very friendly.

If we need to provide incentives, which areas should we emphasize?

- Developing sites are becoming more expensive and more constrained. Stormwater and parking requirements are hard to meet when having to assemble small lots.
- Multi-layers of jurisdictions outside of County purview like SWFWMD, EPA, etc. There are more strict stormwater requirements that depend on if the site is near an impaired water body. There is a problem with perception of it being a difficult process, so the County needs to be advocates.
- It would help to show models of what can be done, like the Bay Area of San Diego, with great anchors like convention centers. But they had many years of problems too.
- When I lived in Madison, we held a Charrette, 3-4 weeks, open house, defined how to be redeveloped, success ever since then. If you talk to most people, they get it, thinking the same way, some differences, but more consensus, the public must engaged. If you do it in isolation, you will end up with the same thing as before. There are internal politics, need to open it up.
- What about form based zoning? It makes sense, more flexible for occupants, allow uses to change over time. There might be an opportunity for that as a hybrid.

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.