PLANNING TO STAY

An Element

of the

PINELLAS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Prepared By:

THE PINELLAS COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

As The

LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY

For

THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................................. 1

PINELLAS COUNTY TODAY– CITIES, SMALL TOWNS, AND SUBURBS ....... 2

PINELLAS COUNTY – A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE ...................................................... 15

IS PINELLAS UNIQUE AMONG URBAN COUNTIES? ........................................ 21

CHALLENGES OF BUILDOUT IN PINELLAS COUNTY ............................................. 25
Providing a Quality Environment .......................................................................................................................... 25
Land Use Patterns .................................................................................................................................................. 26
Strong and Vital Neighborhoods .......................................................................................................................... 27
Renaissance of Urban and Town Centers ........................................................................................................... 29
Matching Development with Natural Resource and Infrastructure Constraints .......... 31
Protecting and Restoring Pinellas County’s Natural Heritage ................................................................. 33
Housing ................................................................................................................................................................. 34
Mobility .................................................................................................................................................................. 36
Remaining Competitive in the Regional and Global Economy .......................................................... 39

WORKING PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE DECISIONS ON BUILDOUT ................. 43
General ................................................................................................................................................................. 43
Urban Communities ............................................................................................................................................... 43
Housing ................................................................................................................................................................. 46
Natural Heritage .................................................................................................................................................... 47
Mobility ................................................................................................................................................................. 47
Economy ................................................................................................................................................................. 48

APPENDIX A: Short History of Urban Development in Pinellas County, Florida . 50

ENDNOTES ......................................................................................................................................................... 53
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Existing Land Use in Pinellas County, Florida –1989 and 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Real Property Taxable Value by Land Use Categories, Pinellas County, Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Personal Income in Pinellas County, Florida –Derived from Earnings by Place of Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Number of Dwelling Units by Type in Pinellas County, Florida In Feb. 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Per Capita Personal Income (PCPI) in 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Urbanized Area Population Density per Square Mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Comparison of Educational Attainment for Different Areas of the United States in 1990 and 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Communities and Rail Lines in Pinellas County, Florida – 1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Municipalities and Unincorporated Areas in Pinellas County - November 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vacant Parcels of Land – 5 Acres or Larger in Pinellas County – January 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recreation and Open Space Map – Pinellas County, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Scenic/Non-Commercial Corridors and Beautification Corridors in Pinellas County, Florida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Population Growth in Pinellas County and the Tampa – St. Petersburg – Clearwater – Metro Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Employment in Pinellas County and the Tampa – St. Petersburg – Clearwater – Metro Area – 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Regionally Significant Transportation Facilities In the Tampa Bay Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Downtown Redevelopment &amp; Florida Main Street Programs in Pinellas County, Florida – 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Public Community Colleges and Institutions Offering Bachelor’s Degrees or Higher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Pinellas County is an urban county located along the west coast of Florida on a peninsula separating Tampa Bay from the Gulf of Mexico. In land area, the County is small – only 280 square miles in size - yet its population of approximately 921,000 permanent residents at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century makes it the fifth most populous county in Florida, and 41st in the nation. More important than the phenomenal growth that has occurred in Pinellas County over the decades since the end of World War II is the transition that the County is undergoing as the new century begins. In a little more than 125 years, Pinellas County was transformed from an isolated, largely undisturbed wilderness into a major urban community. Until a few years ago, this transformation was propelled by the conversion of raw undeveloped land to urban uses. The County’s small size, however, and the speed with which this urban growth occurred has placed Pinellas in a position at the turn of the century where it will soon become the first county in the State of Florida to run out of undeveloped vacant land available for growth and development. Sometimes referred to as “buildout”, this situation has occurred only infrequently among counties throughout the nation, especially those that have experienced most of their growth following World War II. The existing scarcity of vacant land in Pinellas is already providing businesses, residents, and local governments some idea of what to expect from buildout.

The aim of this element is to take a look at Pinellas County at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century to see what its history, and the current and near-term conditions, may tell us about what to expect as we enter the new century. It also proposes to help solidify the vision of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners for the future of Pinellas County over the next twenty years. Some specific challenges facing the County and its citizens and businesses are identified along with working principles to serve as a guide for County decisions in response to buildout. This element is not based on some presumed symbolic importance associated with the Year 2000, but is grounded in the fact that the County is in transition. An emphasis on how to manage the rapid expansion of urban/suburban development into previously undeveloped areas is being replaced by the demands of an existing urban environment with no room left to expand in Pinellas County. The lessons that were learned through the successes and disappointments of a rapidly growing county must now be adapted to the needs of a maturing urban area where new development is increasingly occurring as redevelopment and infill development.

A key concept in planning for the future of Pinellas County is the idea expressed by the Board of County Commissioners at a Visioning Workshop in 1997. During that workshop, the individual members of the Board were united in agreement that Pinellas County should be the kind of place where families and businesses will want to stay and where children will want to remain or return once they become adults. This idea of people and businesses planning to stay in Pinellas County because they desire to live and work nowhere else is foundational to an overall vision for the future of Pinellas County. The title of this report reflects that importance.

*The title for this Element is borrowed from a book entitled, Planning to Stay: learning to see physical features of your neighborhood, by William R. Moorish and Catherine R. Brown.
Pinellas County is entering the new century as a major urban county of around 921,000 permanent residents. Add to this number an annual influx of more than 4 million visitors and tourists, and almost 50,000 seasonal residents, and it becomes clear how completely this small area of only 280 square miles has been transformed since 1900 when the population stood at only 2,572 people. But in this urban transformation the individual small towns and villages that were settled in the late 19th or early 20th centuries have survived either as separate governmental entities or as distinct communities that have retained the name by which they were identified with earlier in the century. Figure 1 shows the location of the numerous small settlements that were scattered throughout Pinellas County in 1913. Most of these small towns and villages have incorporated, while the remainder continue as distinct communities within a municipality or in the unincorporated area. Also note the importance of the railroads as transportation corridors linking these communities together.

Today, Pinellas County contains twenty-four municipalities ranging in population from St. Petersburg (248,232 residents) to Belleair Shore (62 residents). Their locations are shown in Figure 2. In addition, the unincorporated area (with 287,952 residents) includes such historic communities as Ozona, Old Palm Harbor (formerly known as Sutherland), Lealman, Dansville, and Crystal Beach, as well as several unincorporated communities that largely came into existence during the past thirty to forty years. A partial list of these latter communities includes East Lake Tarpon, Greater Palm Harbor, Greater Seminole, Feather Sound, and Tierra Verde, all of which have become recognized as distinct communities in their own right. Pinellas County, though small in size, has been blessed with a variety of urban environments. There are large cities such as St. Petersburg and Clearwater, communities that retain their small town feel and connections with their historic roots, barrier island communities, and areas having a more suburban character. It may be that this mix of cities, small towns, and suburban lifestyles on a beautiful peninsula in subtropical Florida are what will distinguish Pinellas County from other urban counties around the nation. This diversity of urban environments provides people with a choice of lifestyles. Retaining and enhancing these distinctive community characteristics will provide a significant challenge, as well as enormous benefits, to the citizens of Pinellas County.

To appreciate this existing urban pattern and how it came about, it is important to understand the role of history in the development of Pinellas County. A brief history of urban development in Pinellas County is provided as an appendix at the end of this report.

Pinellas County will be the first county within Florida to achieve buildout. Today only six percent of the County consists of vacant developable land; as recently as 1989 the figure was 15 percent. Table 1 compares how land is used in Pinellas County in the Year 2000 with how it was used in 1989. When looking at current land use patterns, most of the remaining vacant property suitable for development is comprised of small tracts of land distributed throughout the existing urban area. Figure 3 shows the location of all developable vacant tracts of land five acres or larger in November 2001. Until recently much of this vacant land was located north of Curlew Road, but the rapid growth of north
Figure 1
Communities and Rail Lines in Pinellas County, Florida 1913
Source: U. S. Dept. Of Agriculture, Bureau of Soils, 1913
FIGURE 2
Municipalities and Unincorporated Areas in Pinellas County
November 2001

Click Here for map
FIGURE 3
Vacant Parcel of Land
5 Acres or Larger
in
Pinellas County Florida
January 2003

Click Here for map
Pinellas County has exhausted much of this vacant acreage. As a result, a substantial portion of the County’s remaining vacant land is now located in the Gateway/Mid-Pinellas Area where I-275, Ulmerton Road, Gandy Boulevard, U.S. Highway 19, and 49th Street converge. This area has been planned since the 1970s to serve as the County’s major employment center and contains more than 60 percent of the planned industrial acreage in Pinellas. In addition, roughly 23 percent of the vacant acreage in the County is located in the Gateway/Mid-Pinellas Area ensuring that a significant portion of the County’s employment growth in the next few years will occur in the mid-county area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single Family</td>
<td>46,023.60</td>
<td>25.77</td>
<td>51,537.04</td>
<td>28.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Home</td>
<td>5,720.30</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>5,548.43</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplex-Triplex</td>
<td>1,589.00</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>1,576.29</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Family</td>
<td>8,836.10</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>10,374.01</td>
<td>5.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>9,331.30</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>10,368.88</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>4,449.20</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>5,667.21</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Semi-Public</td>
<td>11,979.70</td>
<td>6.71</td>
<td>12,452.10</td>
<td>6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>2,876.60</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>1,521.65</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation and Open Space</td>
<td>12,810.00</td>
<td>7.17</td>
<td>13,927.85</td>
<td>7.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant Land</td>
<td>27,234.40</td>
<td>15.25</td>
<td>11,338.44</td>
<td>6.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5,596.88</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation/Preservation</td>
<td>12,938.10</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>21,584.22</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marinas</td>
<td>347.40</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>215.34</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Net Acreage</strong></td>
<td><strong>148,878.90</strong></td>
<td><strong>83.11</strong></td>
<td><strong>151,708.35</strong></td>
<td><strong>84.38</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross Acreage</strong></td>
<td><strong>179,130.10</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>179,789.27</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pinellas County Planning Department, Fall 1988, February 2000.

1 Existing land use category acreage as a percentage of total gross acreage in the County.

2 Net acreage does not include public rights-of-way.

The contribution that a specific type of land use makes to the County’s tax base is not always proportionate to its percentage composition of the County’s total land area. Table 2 shows not only how Pinellas County’s tax base has changed in the eleven years from 1990 to 2000, but also the relative contribution that each existing land use has made to the overall tax base. For example, while single-family residential land use comprised slightly more that 28 percent of the County’s net acreage in the Year 2000, it represented 43 percent of the real property taxable value. Similarly, commercial and industrial land uses accounted for 9.27 percent of the County’s net acreage in 2000, yet represented 32 percent of the taxable value. Other existing land use categories (e.g. public/semi-public and mobile homes), however, made a contribution to the tax base that was smaller than their percentage of the County’s land area. Table 2 makes it clear that residential development represented by far the most significant component of the County’s tax base – i.e. 64 percent in the Year 2000 – while comprising 38.38 percent of the County’s net acreage. In fact, residential development’s contribution to the tax base increased from 59 percent to 64 percent from 1990 to 2000. A similar disproportionate contribution to the
tax base is observed for commercial and industrial properties, which represented 32 percent of the tax base, yet comprised only 9.3 percent of the land area.

Table 2
Real Property and Tangible Personal Taxable Value by Land Use Categories, Pinellas County, Florida

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAND USE CATEGORIES</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taxable Value (x 000's)</td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>Taxable Value (x 000's)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Family Residential</td>
<td>$10,911,153</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>$12,717,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Homes</td>
<td>46,656</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>49,595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Family, Condominiums, and Cooperatives</td>
<td>6,061,109</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6,449,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement Homes and Miscellaneous Residential</td>
<td>22,257</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>14,916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Commercial/Industrial</td>
<td>6,446,031</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>6,372,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Commercial/Industrial (Tangible Personal Property)</td>
<td>3,082,330</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3,592,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Semi-Public (Institutional and Government)</td>
<td>464,235</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>562,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>27,341</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>15,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant (Residential, Commercial, and Industrial)</td>
<td>1,586,145</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1,223,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous, Leasehold Interests</td>
<td>211,007</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>174,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Agricultural Acreage</td>
<td>184,881</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>56,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$29,043,145</td>
<td>$31,229,784</td>
<td>$38,960,413</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 This table considers real property taxable values, which includes land, building, and improvements to the land. The taxable value of tangible personal property is also included in this table. Tangible personal property includes furniture, fixtures, and equipment located in businesses and rental property.

2 Tangible personal property is primarily attributed to commercial and industrial land uses. Consequently, this table places the entire taxable value for tangible personal property within the Improved Commercial and Industrial land use category.

Pinellas County’s economy has developed in response to numerous influences that are briefly described in the appendix at the end of this element. Table 3 identifies the amount of personal income that is derived from earnings obtained from one’s place of work. It is clear from this table that the services industry is the largest sector of the County’s economy, and that between 1993 and 1999 earnings growth was greatest in the wholesale trade; services; and finance, insurance, and real estate sectors. The overall earnings growth for this five-year period was 50 percent. Another important segment of the local economy is the substantial transfer payments to individuals, which is in large measure due to the County’s retirees. In 1996, these transfer payments amounted to $4.74 billion. While not listed as a separate industry in the information provided by the U.S. Department of Commerce, tourism continues to be Pinellas County’s largest industry and
has made a significant contribution to the growth in personal income among the various industry sectors identified in Table 3.

The increased number and variety of job opportunities has caused a shift in local demographics as the County has become a more attractive location for younger people. Once thought of as a retirement haven, Pinellas County during the 1980’s saw 72 percent of its population growth occur among those aged 25 to 44. One result was a decrease in the County’s median age by almost 4 years, while at the state and national levels the median age increased during the decade. During the 1990’s, Pinellas County’s median age inched up slightly from 42.1 to 43.0 years of age, despite a reduction in the number of residents aged 65 and older and an increase in the number of school-age children. This slight increase in the median age can be attributed to the fact that 76 percent of the population growth during the 1990’s occurred among those between the ages of 45 to 64. The ramifications of a younger population include increased demand for such things as classroom space and active recreation facilities, which have a direct impact on funding and program decisions by the School Board, local governments, and other service providers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Personal Income in Pinellas County, Florida Derived from Earnings by Place of Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earnings by Industry 1999</td>
<td>% Change 1993-1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>$ 6.13 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>$ 1.92 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government &amp; Gov’t Enterprises</td>
<td>$ 1.87 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>$ 1.86 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, Insurance, &amp; Real Estate</td>
<td>$ 1.75 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>$1.10 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>$ .85 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation/Public Utilities</td>
<td>$ .77 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Services &amp; Fishing</td>
<td>$ .13 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Earnings by Place of Work</strong></td>
<td><strong>$16.38 billion</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


With such a small percentage of the County available as vacant developable land, one might be tempted to conclude that the peninsula is completely developed. Fortunately, on a county-wide basis, almost one-fifth of Pinellas County (approximately 35,500 acres) is set aside for parks, open space, natural areas, and recreational facilities. This has been achieved through a combination of private investment in recreational amenities such as golf courses and subdivision recreational facilities, public investments in park development and acquiring environmentally sensitive lands and parkland, and governmental regulations protecting natural resources such as wetlands. A key component of this countywide effort has been aggressive efforts by the Board of County Commissioners to protect the environmental integrity of the major ecosystems (i.e. pine flatwoods and wetland systems) and the regional wellfield located in the East Lake Area in northeastern Pinellas County. As a result, almost 52 percent of the open space in the
County is located here. However, as Figure 4 clearly illustrates, recreational facilities, parks, open space and natural areas are distributed throughout the County.

Much of the environmentally sensitive lands and parkland in county ownership is the result of a successful land acquisition program begun in the early 1970s. In response to the dramatic growth that occurred following the end of World War II, the Red Flag Charrette of Pinellas County was conducted in 1972 to develop recommendations on protecting the County’s natural resources and ensuring that there would be adequate open space and parkland as the County continued to grow. One of the recommendations was the proposed one mil increase in ad valorem taxes for two years in Pinellas County to raise funds to acquire public parkland and areas to be set aside as environmentally-sensitive lands. The citizens and the County’s leaders had seen how the development of coastal areas and upland forests and wetlands was becoming too costly in terms of lost green space, dysfunctional natural systems, and the loss of the natural beauty that distinguished the Pinellas peninsula from other areas. The voters of Pinellas County passed this referendum in 1972, which clearly showed that the residents of Pinellas County cared about what their community would look like in the future. Many of them (in 1970, 28.3% according to the U.S. Census) had only moved to the area within the previous ten years, and yet the referendum was approved by 67% of the voters, demonstrating their support for preserving areas of natural beauty in the rapidly growing county. This strong support for preserving the natural environment was exhibited again in 1984, 1986, 1989, and 1997 when citizens of Pinellas County voted to tax themselves to continue acquiring endangered environmental lands and open space.

This interest in environmental stewardship was also evident at the state and national levels, and resulted in a host of programs and regulations at the federal, state, and local levels to ameliorate the impact of development on natural resources. Regulations protecting wetlands, water and air quality, the marine environment, and other natural resources were put into effect in the 1970s and refined in the following decades. Development in Pinellas County since the implementation of these regulatory programs has been considerably more compatible with the natural environment than what had occurred in prior decades. It is no coincidence that the concentrations of environmentally sensitive lands and open space seen in Figure 4 can be closely correlated with those areas of the County that have developed in the last three decades.

By far, the largest percentage of the County’s area is devoted to single-family housing. Twenty-nine percent (or 51,537 acres) of the peninsula is comprised of residential neighborhoods consisting of detached houses located on individual lots. Mobile homes also represent an important component of the housing stock in Pinellas County – the more than 56,000 mobile home units comprise almost 12 percent of the total dwelling units countywide. The preponderance of land committed to single-family housing and mobile homes is largely responsible for the low-density look of much of the peninsula. This is not to downplay the importance of multi-family housing; although representing only 6.6 percent of the County’s land area, multi-family housing accounts for 40 percent
of all housing units in Pinellas County. This form of housing appears to be almost randomly dispersed throughout the County, occurring along or near major roadways, on the barrier islands, and along certain sections of the coastline. Interestingly, new multi-family housing is being introduced into the downtown areas of cities such as St. Petersburg and Dunedin. Table 4 summarizes information on the number of different types of dwelling units throughout Pinellas County at the turn of the century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Dwelling Unit</th>
<th>Number of Units</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single-family Detached</td>
<td>232,528</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Home</td>
<td>56,456</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duplex-Triplex</td>
<td>19,698</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-family</td>
<td>174,045</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Office or Commercial</td>
<td>967</td>
<td>0.002%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units</strong></td>
<td><strong>483,705</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pinellas County Planning Department, February 2000.

The buildings where people shop, work, and obtain services are primarily located along the County’s major roadways. The resulting linear commercial corridors were developed in response to the primary mode of transportation – the automobile, which unfortunately in some locations has resulted in nondescript landscapes that do not represent any particular community history or character. In this regard, development in Pinellas County followed the pattern that came to dominate, with few exceptions, the newer urban landscapes across the country. It was a practical response to the increased mobility provided by the automobile, and these strip commercial areas are often the economic backbone of the community. Access on foot or bicycle, however, is often rendered impractical because of a lack of sidewalks, safe bicycle routes, etc. Alternatives to the strip commercialization of the road corridors were the development of large, master planned office and industrial parks, and regional malls. While good road access is still important, office and industrial development within these master planned projects usually occurs in a landscaped setting where access for individual businesses within the campus is usually provided internal to the project rather than directly from the public roadway. The regional malls, meanwhile, superseded the downtown commercial districts - characterized by a large number of individual business and property owners - with a centrally owned and managed alternative that provided shoppers with predictability, security, and a strategically determined mix of stores. This overall development pattern, heavily influenced by the automobile, resulted in the dispersal of jobs and services around the County, rather than their concentration in a few employment centers such as downtown areas. This dispersal of jobs, in conjunction with the low residential densities found in much of the County, has not proven conducive to supporting public transit.
FIGURE 4
Pinellas County, Florida
RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE MAP
November 2001

Click Here for map
In response to the tremendous growth occurring in Pinellas County, it was necessary to construct new roads in areas of the county that were rapidly urbanizing. It became increasingly evident during this time that these new roads generated a typical land development pattern characterized by retail and service uses and higher dwelling unit densities along the road corridor. This resultant development pattern soon overwhelmed the roadway’s operating capacity and at the same time often severely degraded scenic resources along the roadway. Reflecting the national concern of the early 1960s regarding the appearance of road corridors and the need to protect the public’s investment in these expensive transportation facilities, Pinellas County established its scenic/non-commercial corridor program in 1964. The scenic/non-commercial corridor designation was established to protect the traffic-carrying capacity and the aesthetic qualities of roadways considered most important in terms of traffic circulation and scenic value. Figure 5 identifies those county and state roadways that have been designated as scenic/non-commercial corridors in Pinellas County. These designated corridors are protected by policies and regulations that restrict nonresidential development, encourage lower density residential development, control off-premise signs, and encourage additional landscaping along the roadway.

Figure 5 also includes those additional roadways that are identified on the countywide Future Land Use Plan as scenic/non-commercial corridors, as well as those roads, bridges, and causeways meriting special recognition for the scenic vistas they provide, especially of the waters and shoreline encompassing much of the County. Of special note is the main north/south roadway corridor along the County’s barrier islands. Called Gulf Boulevard over much of its length, this corridor provides the only direct access to most of the County’s beaches, tourist and seasonal accommodations, and attendant retail and service establishments. Pinellas County and the barrier island communities have identified the beautification of Gulf Boulevard as a key project for consolidating Pinellas County’s position as a major competitor in the tourism industry. Pinellas County and the barrier island communities are moving forward in a joint venture to beautify Gulf Boulevard, in recognition of the significant contribution scenic improvements on the barrier islands can make to the County’s economy through enhanced tourism revenues. There has also been interest expressed in extending this beautification northward along Alternate U.S. Highway 19 from Downtown Clearwater to the Pasco County line. Alternate U.S. Highway 19 is a coastal highway that passes through the historic downtowns of Clearwater, Dunedin, Palm Harbor, and Tarpon Springs. When combined with the Gulf Boulevard project, it represents a coastal beautification corridor that interconnects numerous coastal communities important to the tourism industry in Pinellas County.

At the same time the citizens of Pinellas County were registering support for protecting open space and environmental lands at the polls, they soundly defeated in 1976 (by a ratio of 8 to 1) a proposal for a limited access expressway running through north and mid-county along the McMullen-Booth corridor. This facility would have been funded through tolls. In response to this defeat, County officials decided to focus on upgrades to U.S. Highway 19 and to eliminate any consideration of additional planned expressways, although Pinellas County committed to construct roadways parallel to U.S. Highway 19 to relieve some of the traffic on this State roadway. One result of the referendum is that there has been no limited access road facility serving the tremendous growth that
Figure 5
Scenic/Non-Commercial Corridors As Designated
By The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners

Click to View Map
subsequently occurred in mid and north county. It was not until the local comprehensive planning effort of the late 1980s documented the deficiencies of the existing road network and at the same time presented a concrete plan to remedy the problem, that the citizens were ready to tax themselves for providing the necessary roads. With the need clearly presented and a plan in place, the residents of Pinellas County narrowly supported a countywide referendum in 1989 establishing a one-cent infrastructure sales tax (Penny for Pinellas) that would generate millions of dollars to fund construction of roads and other needed capital projects. But by this time the road construction program was focused on overcoming a huge backlog in the road system required by the area’s rapid growth during the years since the end of World War II. This road program is further supported by revenue generated from the 6 cent local option gas tax approved by the County Commission. One important goal of the County’s transportation program is to build roadway corridors parallel to overburdened state roads in order to relieve traffic congestion on those facilities. This goal has nearly been achieved through the construction of the Belcher Road and the East Lake/McMullen-Booth/Bayside Bride/49th Street corridors west and east of U.S. Highway 19, and the Bryan Dairy Road/C.R.296/118th Street corridor south of Ulmerton Road (S.R.688). While achieving this objective will have taken about twenty-five years from planning to implementation, it was the passage of the two Penny for Pinellas referenda that enabled the County to have sufficient funds to move these road projects forward.

The Penny for Pinellas has also allowed Pinellas County and the various municipalities to construct a wide range of needed capital projects in addition to roads that have had a dramatic and clearly recognizable improvement in the quality of life for residents throughout the County. As a result, the Penny for Pinellas was extended for another ten years out to 2010 by 65% of the voters in March 1997.

One of the key projects that was undertaken by Pinellas County upon passage of the Penny for Pinellas in 1989 was the construction of the Pinellas Trail spanning the length of the county upon an abandoned railroad corridor. This urban multi-purpose trail is used extensively by both residents and visitors and has become part of the County’s community fabric by providing a safe and pleasant way to travel from one community or neighborhood to another by bicycle, roller blade, or on foot. The railroad that once connected isolated villages in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has been replaced by a trail that serves a similar function. It brings neighborhoods together both physically and socially, and has even helped spur economic development in such areas as downtown Dunedin. The success of the Pinellas Trail has spawned the planning and development of additional recreation trails throughout Pinellas County; the salutary effect on the communities and neighborhoods traversed by these trails should further enhance the quality of life for both residents and visitors.

In Pinellas County at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century one finds for the most part an urban scene dominated by low buildings and low density housing. There is no one downtown center of tall buildings that dominates the County by way of its economic, political, and cultural significance. There is no central business district, which exemplifies and symbolizes Pinellas County in peoples’ minds, such as downtown San Francisco does for the San Francisco Bay area. Rather than an impressive skyline, most people would associate Pinellas County with sandy beaches, miles of shoreline, an exemplary urban trail system, and diverse communities (many with their own downtowns). The area’s natural resources and peninsular location have played a central
role in helping define the County’s image – and continue to do so. For example, the preservation and restoration efforts of the past several decades have resulted in a unique blend of urban and natural environments that is setting Pinellas County apart as a tourist destination that offers numerous and diverse ecological habitats and cultural resources within a major metropolitan area. Pinellas offers areas of matchless beauty, while the historic roots of the peninsula’s numerous communities in most cases remain intact, although at times these roots are obscured by more recent development and years of neglect. The success of current efforts to preserve, enhance, and revitalize the County’s diverse communities and natural environment will play a major role in determining the quality of life in Pinellas County and its municipalities.

PINELLAS COUNTY – A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Pinellas County is part of the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan area, which encompasses several cities and the counties of Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, and Hernando. That there are three cities included in the name of the metro area is evidence that no one city serves as the nucleus for the region. In fact, even the combined population of these three cities – about 660,500 residents - represents only a fraction of the metro area’s 2.40 million. And this fraction continues to get smaller as more and more of the population growth occurs in the smaller municipalities and unincorporated areas; only about 13 percent of the population growth in the metro area between 1990 and 2000 occurred in the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater. Consequently, the metropolitan area replicates the situation found within Pinellas County in which there is no main central city, or cities, that dominates. In this respect the metro region centered on Tampa Bay is similar to most metro areas of the United States in which there is not one but several centers.

In 1949, the U.S. Census Bureau adopted the term metropolitan area “in order to recognize that urbanization had outstripped traditional city limits and that a new classification was needed”. In the United States, a metropolitan area is defined as a large population nucleus – for Tampa Bay three cities (Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater) represent the nucleus – and the adjacent communities with which the cities in the nucleus have a high degree of social and economic integration. Fifty-one years ago when the concept of metropolitan areas was developed, the central city – or cities in Tampa Bay’s case – were usually the economic and population centers for the metro area. Since then, however, more and more people are choosing to live outside the central cities; and this phenomenon now also includes employment as more and more businesses locate outside the older downtowns. In the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metro area, Joel Garreau, the author of Edge City, Life on the New Frontier, identified three major employment centers outside the older downtown areas of Tampa and St. Petersburg. One of these “edge cities” he considered to be established in the West Shore-Airport area, while two were emerging in the Gateway area of Pinellas County and along Interstate 75 in Hillsborough County. For example, in 1999, the Gateway area contained roughly twice the amount of office space as downtown St. Petersburg. No doubt, additional major employment centers will become established in the metro area in the coming years, providing further evidence that the Tampa Bay region is a large urban area with several centers.
Pinellas County’s 280 square miles represent only 11 percent of the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan area; however, as discussed earlier in this element, the peninsula's desirability as a location for homes and businesses contributed to phenomenal population growth after World War II. As a result, Figure 6 reveals that in spite of its small geographic size, Pinellas, in 1970, contributed 47 percent of the metro area’s total population of 1.1 million residents. During that year, the County’s share of metro area employment totaled 41 percent. In fact, so rapid was this growth that the population of Pinellas overtook that of Hillsborough County — a county more than three and a half times as large — in the 1960s. It was only recently — in the mid-1990s — that Hillsborough County reclaimed first place in the metro area, probably to remain unchallenged due to the County’s large area and location centered on Tampa Bay. With little undeveloped land remaining for development, Pinellas is experiencing a leveling off of its population, which is expected to peak at around one million between 2025 and 2030. With the metro area expanding outward from its historic focus on Tampa Bay and the Pinellas peninsula, Pinellas County accounted for approximately 39 percent of the metro area’s population in the Year 2000, and is expected to drop to 34 percent by the Year 2020. A similar decrease is expected for employment.

In 1999, total personal income in Pinellas County amounted to $27.8 billion, representing 43.4 percent of the figure for the entire metro area ($64.1 billion). During that same year, the per capita personal income (PCPI) in Pinellas County was $31,658, which was ranked 8th in the State. This figure exceeded the metro area’s PCPI by $3,513 and was 114 percent of the State average, $27,781, and 111 percent of the national average, $28,546 (Table 5). Pinellas County’s average annual growth rate of PCPI over the ten years from 1989 to 1999 was 4.1 percent. The average annual growth rate for the State was 3.8 percent and for the nation was 4.4 percent. Although growth in total personal income may slow down as population growth tapers off due to space limitations for additional residential development, growth in per capita personal income does not have to be restricted by buildout. In fact, if decisions are made that enhance the livability and economic conditions in Pinellas County, growth in PCPI can remain above the rates for the region, and State, and can reach and exceed the rate for the nation. This will in large measure be based on the types of jobs created in the County and lured here from other counties and regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction</th>
<th>PCPI in 1999</th>
<th>Average Annual Growth Rate (1989 – 1999)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinellas County</td>
<td>$31,658</td>
<td>4.1 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampa – St. Petersburg – Clearwater Metro Area</td>
<td>$28,145</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>$27,781</td>
<td>3.8 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$28,546</td>
<td>4.4 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The breakdown of employment in Pinellas County and the metro area in 1997 is shown on Figure 7. The three largest employment sectors in Pinellas County are services (39.9 percent), retail trade (18.3 percent), and manufacturing (9.3 percent). In the metro area, the three largest sectors are services, retail trade, and government/government enterprises. When comparing the 1997 Pinellas County data with employment figures for 1960, it is clear that while the three largest employment sectors have not changed (they were services, retail trade, and manufacturing in 1960), there has been a substantial increase in the percentage of the workforce employed in the service sector while there has been a reduction in the percentages engaged in retail trade and manufacturing. In 1960, 26.7 percent of employment occurred in the services sector of the economy, but by 1997 this percentage had increased to 39.9 percent. This substantial increase was offset by decreases in the agricultural services, construction, manufacturing, transportation and public utilities, and retail trade sectors of the local economy.

Personal income derived from earnings from employment is another barometer that can be used to measure change in the economic climate of an area. For example, in Pinellas County and the metro area, the total earnings derived from the services sector of the economy increased by 39 percent and 42 percent, respectively, between 1993 and 1997. Within the services sector itself, total earnings from business services in Pinellas County more than doubled during this 5-year period so that business services represents the second largest component of the services sector right behind health services. It is clear that the services sector has increased its lead as the largest sector of the local and regional economy. This trend is also occurring at both the State and national levels.

The relatively recent phenomenon in which Pinellas County finds itself outpaced in population growth by the other counties in the metro area does not mean that Pinellas has reached the apogee of its influence in the region. After all, unlimited growth is not the policy being pursued in Pinellas County. Retaining, and enhancing, the County’s high quality of life will be instrumental in ensuring that Pinellas remains a desirable place to live and work. Consequently, wise management of the human, natural, financial, and manmade resources available to Pinellas will continue to have perhaps the most significant influence on the future of the County. Within a regional context, some of the resources that require responsible management are the transportation system, our water resources, our communications network, our natural and historical heritage, and our educational and cultural institutions. In each of these areas, it is important that, as the metro area expands in extent and in population, Pinellas County remain closely integrated with the rest of the region. For example, good accessibility is essential for a metro area and for an urban county. Consequently, the regional transportation network is of primary importance to the future of Pinellas County, which finds itself relatively isolated on a peninsula on the western edge of the metro area. As discussed in the Appendix to this element, inadequate transportation facilities hampered early development of the peninsula, and the inattention of remote decision-makers to the peninsula’s transportation problems was one of the primary motivations leading to creation of Pinellas County in 1912. The accessibility of Pinellas County is dependent upon roadways that pass through other urban counties of the metro area, as seen in Figure 8. No matter how much Pinellas invests in its internal transportation system, accessibility to other markets within and outside the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metro area relies upon roads over which Pinellas has little control or responsibility. For this reason, regional cooperation on transportation issues is perhaps more critical to Pinellas than to its neighboring counties.
FIGURE 6
Population Growth in Pinellas County and Tampa – St Petersburg – Clearwater Metro Area

Click to View Map
FIGURE 7
Employment in Pinellas County and the Tampa – St. Petersburg – Clearwater Metro Area in 1997

Click to View Map
A major transportation nucleus for urban areas at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century is the region’s airport. In many metro areas, these critically important facilities are located on the urban fringe. In Tampa Bay, however, the two major airports are located in the center of the expanding metro area. The locations of Tampa International Airport and St. Petersburg-Clearwater International Airport (see Figure 8) put them in an excellent position to serve the needs of Pinellas County’s residents and businesses. This central location is a powerful stimulus for the continued vitality of the urban core of the metro area. It is not too difficult to imagine the implications on the local economy if Tampa International Airport had been located on the other side of Hillsborough County.

In the Twenty-first Century, the regional economy will be increasingly dependent upon the quality of the communications network that links the metro area with the rest of the world. The investments made in communication infrastructure will be as important to the future of Pinellas County and the region as the investments made in such areas as transportation, education, social services and housing. For example, the availability of high speed internet access is an important criterion for an increasing number of firms in deciding on a location for their business. Those counties and metro areas that offer superior communications services and facilities will have an advantage in the global marketplace. Currently, in Pinellas County, Time Warner Communications and Verizon provide the lines, cable and other facilities for internet service.

The variety and quality of options afforded both residents and visitors for spending their leisure time can have a distinct impact on how people and businesses evaluate a community. No one would deny the benefits that museums, professional sports teams, performing arts centers, zoological parks, and libraries bring to a neighborhood, county, and region. Within the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metro area there is a great variety of leisure time and cultural options available, with the greatest concentration located within the cities of Tampa and St. Petersburg. In fact, contained within a few blocks in downtown St. Petersburg are several museums (Salvador Dali, Florida International Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg Museum of History, Great Explorations), two performing arts venues (Bayfront Center and Mahaffey Theater), and two stadiums (Tropicana Field and Al Lang Stadium). While there are other well-established and successful facilities located throughout Pinellas County, the large concentration in downtown St. Petersburg has made that area a focal point for arts, culture, and sports within Tampa Bay – a drawing card for both residents and visitors. The quality of life in Pinellas County and the metro area is in no small way measured by the community’s investment in, and support for, the arts, culture, and leisure time activities.

Within a metro area that includes four counties, Pinellas County’s geography sets it apart. The three geographic features that have had the most impact on the County and its residents are its peninsular location, Tampa Bay, and the chain of barrier islands off the Gulf coast. The resulting long coastline and nearly 35 miles of sandy beaches combined with the subtropical climate contribute substantially to the quality of life not only in Pinellas County, but also for the entire region. Here is an area where access to the beaches and to marine and estuarine waters is never far away, whether for boating, swimming, scenic vistas, fishing, or other water-related pursuits. Several lakes such as Lake Tarpon and Lake Seminole provide additional recreational opportunities. Of critical importance to the quality of life in Pinellas County and the region, however, is that the area’s waters, beaches, and remaining open spaces remain available to the public and of
sufficient quality to make public access worthwhile. The public must be vigilant to maintain adequate public access to the beaches and open waters, and there must be sufficient recreation facilities and open space in Pinellas County to meet the needs of residents and visitors. At the same time, informed decisions and actions by residents, businesses, and public bodies must continue to support ongoing efforts to preserve and restore the area’s natural environment that in many peoples’ minds symbolizes what is special about Pinellas County and the Tampa Bay Area. One such ongoing effort is the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, which has resulted in the adoption of a Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) for restoring Tampa Bay. The CCMP seeks to improve the natural environment of Tampa Bay within a rapidly expanding urban area through integrating the objectives of the CCMP into the day-to-day decision-making of local governments, public agencies, businesses, and citizens.

**IS PINELLAS UNIQUE AMONG URBAN COUNTIES?**

What urban counties around the country have reached buildout? What changes, if any, occur within a county when additional growth is limited by geography or jurisdictional boundaries? Since counties, unlike cities, are usually unable to expand their boundaries, buildout might generally indicate a leveling off, or even a reduction, in population. Indeed, practically all counties that completed their urban expansion prior to 1950 have experienced a drop in population. New York County, which comprises the island of Manhattan, and San Francisco County are examples. Developed prior to World War II, these counties are small in area and much more densely populated than Pinellas. They also continue to function as vital and viable urban counties in a much larger metropolitan area. While their respective metropolitan areas have continued to expand outward, and their economies represent a decreasing percentage of the overall regional economy, Manhattan and San Francisco continue to take advantage of their natural, human, social, cultural, and political resources to maintain a unique community that entices people and businesses to locate there. Achieving buildout may reorient a county’s focus from outward expansion to redevelopment, but it does not mean that the county will cease to be a vital, stimulating, and adaptable urban environment.

By 1950, New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia and many smaller cities had stopped growing. 1950 is probably as good a date as any to mark the end – or, more accurately, the beginning of the end – of traditional, concentrated cities. Since 1950, the average population density of the 34 metropolitan areas in the United States that exceed 1 million people in size has decreased from 6,121 persons per square mile to 3,411 persons per square mile. This 44 percent decrease in the average population density of the country’s major metropolitan areas from 1950 to 1990 is the direct result of the phenomenal growth in the nation’s suburbs. This profusion of lower density communities was made possible, in large part, by the wide use of the automobile. This pattern of urban development is clearly seen in Pinellas County, which had an overall population density of 3,291 persons per square mile in the Year 2000 and a projected density of approximately 3,600 persons per square mile at buildout. These densities are roughly equivalent to the national average for metropolitan areas of more than 1 million residents. For comparison purposes, Table 6 gives the population densities of several selected metropolitan areas in 1950 and 1990. In most metro areas throughout the nation there was a decrease in density, although Miami and Los Angeles represent examples of urban areas that registered an increase in density.
Recent information on population and employment growth reveals that the decentralization of people and jobs in the United States continued through the 1990s. No doubt the 2000 U.S. Census will show that the average population density for the country’s largest urban areas will have again decreased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urbanized Area</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>4,783</td>
<td>1,897</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>2,596</td>
<td>2,466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>4,589</td>
<td>5,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>3,923</td>
<td>5,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>9,813</td>
<td>5,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>9,363</td>
<td>3,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>3,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco-Oakland</td>
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<td>4,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>5,057</td>
<td>2,966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater</td>
<td>2,267</td>
<td>2,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Areas in the United States</td>
<td>6,121</td>
<td>3,411</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


But are there counties that are at a stage in their urban development comparable to that in Pinellas County? That is, what counties have experienced most of their growth during the age of the automobile and are at the point where all, or almost all, of the available land has been developed? And if there are such counties, can they provide any meaningful insights for what to expect in Pinellas County? Since most counties are much larger than Pinellas, there are few that were found to meet these two criteria. Arlington County and Nassau County, however, are of interest in that a significant share of their growth has occurred since 1950 and they are largely builtout. Nassau County, New York, with a population of 1.29 million residents in 1990 within an area equal in size to Pinellas County, is largely built out and is experiencing redevelopment pressure. Furthermore, about half of its population growth has occurred since 1950; in fact, Levittown, the single-family residential development most often associated with the origin of suburbia, is located in Nassau County. Unfortunately, only limited information on Nassau County was readily available, making any useful comparison with Pinellas County futile.
Arlington County, located in northern Virginia across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., is a very small county of only 25.8 square miles. Although Washington served as the historic center for jobs and population, urban expansion into the surrounding countryside of northern Virginia and Maryland over the past few decades has resulted in Washington losing its status as the most powerful economy in the region. Washington started the 1990s with a respectable 33 percent of the area’s jobs. Seven years later it had only 24 percent. Most of the job creation was occurring in the surrounding counties. Due to its proximity, Arlington County was the first northern Virginia county to experience urbanization as it expanded outward from the Capital. This urban growth has continued to the point that there is little land left in Arlington County that has not been developed. Consequently, the 1998 estimated population of 187,100 residents represented approximately 92 percent of Arlington’s ultimate population. By comparison, in April 2000, Pinellas County’s population was at roughly 92 percent of its ultimate population of approximately one million. It is important to note that growth in northern Virginia is increasingly occurring in the next ring of counties around Washington – primarily Fairfax, but also Loudon. The small size of Arlington County and the limited amount of undeveloped land rendered this inevitable. A similar situation is occurring in the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metropolitan area in that population and urban/suburban growth are expanding outward from the urban core centered around Tampa Bay and the Pinellas peninsula into adjacent counties and rural areas.

Two lines of the Washington metrorail system traverse Arlington County. Before the eleven metro stations located in Arlington were completed, the County developed a sector plan for each station location with considerable citizen involvement. The result has been the creation of “urban villages” with the metro station at the core and with the density and intensity of development decreasing as one moves out from the station. As Arlington County approached buildout several years ago, the response was to go vertical and allow higher densities and intensities around the metrorail stations. The result is one of the highest densities of any urban county in the nation – 7,200 persons per square mile – and a large concentration of office development, which increases the County population threefold during working hours. Most of the development in these urban villages (or metro centers) has been market driven, with the services sector and high technology job growth driving the local economy. Much of the housing growth has been in multi-family units constructed in the metro centers; the single-family neighborhoods have been stable and what little infill development occurs in these neighborhoods is of lower density.

As evidenced by a number of demographic and economic indicators, Arlington County remains a desirable place to live and work just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. It should be noted that redevelopment is focused around selected areas of the County (metro stations) and is planned so that it does not adversely impact the County’s single-family neighborhoods. The relatively high population density, however, has stressed some of the County’s infrastructure, such as the recreation and park system, and there is increasing resistance from local residents to higher density infill development.
FIGURE 8
Regionally Significant Transportation Facilities
In the Tampa Bay Region

Click to View Map
Arlington County represents one county’s response to buildout conditions. While it is possible that buildout conditions will lead to increases in development intensity in some locations within Pinellas County, it is unlikely that Pinellas County, with its large areas devoted to single-family development, will experience the overall residential density and concentration of employment achieved in Arlington.

What became most apparent when looking at other Post-war urban counties is that while many of these counties had a mixture of older and more recently developed areas, very few had run out of undeveloped vacant land limiting growth to redevelopment and infill urban development. This latter condition is more often confronted by municipalities than by counties; consequently city responses to buildout conditions can also provide valuable lessons for Pinellas County.

**CHALLENGES OF BUILDOUT IN PINELLAS COUNTY**

Reflecting upon Pinellas County’s local history, geography, retention of open space, existing patterns of development and governance, the County’s role in the region, and upon national and global urban and economic trends helps provide different perspectives from which to evaluate the impact of buildout on Pinellas County. What follows is a discussion of the various challenges facing Pinellas County that are either directly or indirectly tied to the repercussions associated with buildout. The identification of these challenges is based on observations, research, conversations, and interviews that the Planning Department has conducted over the past few years.

**Providing a Quality Environment**

It is clear that residents, businesses, and local leadership must adjust, and are adjusting, to the challenges that confront Pinellas County as it emerges the first county in Florida to reach buildout. But opportunities as well as challenges present themselves; no longer having to concentrate on keeping ahead of the demands imposed by rapid growth, the County and its municipalities are able to focus more resources on improving the quality of the urban experience and the natural environment. Investing in quality (whether in the neighborhoods, in the schools, in the natural environment and public spaces, in the arts, in the local economy, in the transportation and communication systems, or in other areas of the community) will improve Pinellas County’s appeal as a place to live and work. This will require building on the strengths and unique attributes of the County. At the county level, public policy is slowly shifting from a focus on massive public infrastructure programs that responded to the demands of extensive urban growth and development to a focus that includes more emphasis on protecting and promoting community character, supporting economic development, and enhancing the lives of all segments of the County’s population.
Land Use Patterns

An important question that must be considered is what impact is buildout expected to have on the County’s land use patterns; that is, will buildout effect changes in how land is used? Land use in Pinellas County is the result of varied forces (economic, regulatory, unique environmental issues, geography, social, cultural) whose direction and influence can change over time. There is much interplay between these forces; for example, the regulatory influence on land use has increased over the past thirty years as interest in managing growth and protecting the natural environment have taken on more importance in our nation and our communities. As already discussed, the intense urban concentration of people indicative of older industrial cities never established a secure foothold in Pinellas County. Pinellas County grew under the influence of the automobile, which encouraged dispersion, not concentration. Revolutions in transportation and communication were dispersing urban economic functions and housing into the countryside. The resulting urban landscape is one of extensive single-family neighborhoods, localized higher density apartment and condominium complexes, office and industrial parks, strip commercial development along the highways, and several small downtowns and town centers. A recurring theme of this urbanization is the ever present road network that ties it all together. Without the automobile, the urban form that evolved in Pinellas County during the Twentieth Century (and in practically every other urban county in the nation) could not be sustained. When technology afforded people the choice of living in less-crowded conditions, many people chose to live in the suburbs. It is unlikely that buildout will result in significant increases in density for the existing single-family neighborhoods. It has already been noted that the existing population density in Pinellas County is almost equal to the median density for those urban areas with populations of more than one million. With few exceptions, urban population densities since 1950 have been decreasing in the United States. Recent residential redevelopment and infill development in Pinellas County tends to support the viewpoint that the County is expected to see no significant transition to higher densities as a result of buildout. Infill residential development is occurring on individual lots and small parcels throughout the County at densities that are comparable to what is already built. In some cases, particularly on the waterfront, older homes are being torn down and replaced by much larger residential structures. In neighborhoods throughout Pinellas County, single-family homes are not being replaced by higher density uses, but are being replaced by new single-family structures. Discussions with St. Petersburg planning staff revealed that vacant lots in single-family neighborhoods in that city are being sought for constructing single-family homes and not for increased densities.

Although no significant change in dwelling unit densities are expected in the County’s extensive single-family neighborhoods, the County’s historic downtowns, other community focal points (e.g. Central Avenue in St. Petersburg) and portions of the beach communities, are expected to experience more intensive (re)development. However, such areas will need to be planned so that they do not adversely impact adjacent single-family neighborhoods. Consequently, Pinellas County will continue to have a relatively low overall density with areas of local concentration - providing places where people can get away from each other, and places where people can gather. The areas of concentration will provide exciting urban experiences where some people will want to live in higher density housing in close proximity to jobs, cultural attractions, restaurants, and other urban amenities, while the majority of people will continue to choose to live in
single-family neighborhoods. This land use pattern will provide a range of choices in housing and urban environments in a small county where quality services, employment, education, cultural opportunities, and recreational facilities are close at hand.

As noted earlier, development in Pinellas County after World War II followed a pattern in which the buildings where people shop, work and obtain services were primarily located along the County’s major roadways. This development pattern has resulted in extensive linear commercial corridors where the primary orientation is toward the roadway, providing easy accessibility for the automobile. The businesses and transactions that go on in the numerous shopping centers, office buildings, and manufacturing facilities contained within these corridors represent a significant portion of the local economy. It is evident over time, however, that portions of these commercial corridors have become obsolete due to changes in demographics, shopping patterns, and the road network itself. For example, Sunshine Mall was opened in the 1960s in the City of Clearwater as the County’s first enclosed mall, but by the mid-1990s Sunshine Mall was largely empty as a result of stiff competition from newer regional malls and changes in the retail marketplace. Today, three large apartment complexes have replaced the mall and provide rental housing in a section of Clearwater that had seen little housing development in recent years. In this situation, the City of Clearwater was able to work with the developer in replacing an obsolete structure with completely new uses and buildings in an older portion of the City. This successful conversion should do much to revitalize this area of the City. There are many other areas within the County’s commercial corridors that have not been so fortunate and continue to experience disinvestment and deterioration for a number of reasons. In some cases, the preference of drug stores and supermarkets for large standalone structures have left numerous shopping centers without major tenants. In other cases, shoppers abandon commercial corridors as they look elsewhere for goods and services. The results are underutilized properties and a distressed appearance that can have a negative impact on the surrounding community and the local economy.

One benefit of buildout may be that the limited amount of vacant land within Pinellas County will provide an incentive to redevelop and revitalize these stressed commercial properties and corridors. For example, the desire for additional manufacturing space prompted Pinellas County and the cities of Clearwater and St. Petersburg to allow light manufacturing uses within commercial corridors on a case-by-case basis. This flexibility resulted in some abandoned commercial properties being converted to light manufacturing use (e.g. the former Costco building located at Klosterman Road and U.S. Highway 19), bringing jobs closer to employees and diversifying the local economy by adding manufacturing jobs. But this is only one response. Pinellas County and its municipalities must take a thorough look at these commercial corridors to ensure that they are able to successfully adapt to the ever changing demands of the community and the marketplace.

**Strong and Vital Neighborhoods**

One urban thinker claims, rightly so, that neighborhoods are the lifeblood of the city, or any urban area. Local governments throughout Pinellas County have recognized the importance of strong and vital neighborhoods in creating places where people want to stay and invest their lives. Until recently, much of the attention in Pinellas County had been focused on the development of new residential communities as growth expanded...
over the countryside. The rapid development of new housing at times resulted in the neglect of older residential areas that were usually clustered around the historic downtowns and older town centers that existed before World War II. But as cities, and now the County, run out of large tracts of vacant land for residential development, interest in older communities is rekindled. This renewed interest in older neighborhoods, at times encouraged by public investment, occurred first in St. Petersburg where the population stabilized at around 245,000 in the 1980s. To find new housing, people and families were having to move to north Pinellas or adjacent counties. But if the jobs were in downtown St. Petersburg or the mid-county Gateway Area, leaving St. Petersburg in search of new housing often meant longer commutes and more time on the road. As an alternative, people began to invest in the older, close-in neighborhoods near downtown St. Petersburg causing them to evolve in several important ways. One evidence of this evolution has been the change in demographics as younger families move into neighborhoods once primarily the province of the elderly. This change in demographics has had ripple effects throughout the neighborhoods – e.g. increased demand for active recreational facilities, and the need for additional class space in an area of the County that is experiencing little population growth overall. More evidence that these communities are evolving is found in the restoration of older homes and a reduction in the number of vacant and boarded up homes. In fact, it has been emphasized by those involved in revitalization efforts that a successful neighborhood will look good. The presence of trash, unkempt properties, vacant and boarded up homes are interpreted as unmistakable signs that people do not care about their community, which in turn is a disincentive for people to invest in that area.

The rest of Pinellas County has quickly caught up to where St. Petersburg was a few years ago in that it will soon be difficult to find new housing without having to travel to less developed areas outside of the County’s borders. But the renewed interest in older neighborhoods and communities has more behind it than the basic need for housing. These older areas with narrow tree-lined streets, sidewalks, a variety of housing options and styles, and in some cases historic structures, exude a sense of character that is often lacking in the newer subdivisions. Even more important, their pedestrian scale based on an urban design model that predated the dominance of the automobile promotes among residents a sense of community. The challenge facing Pinellas County is not only preserving, restoring and renewing older neighborhoods, but also remaking and humanizing the rush of post-World War II subdivisions that blanket much of Pinellas County. Even the simple addition of sidewalks can serve as a cohesive factor to bring the community together. For example, it has been argued that the ability of the Pinellas Trail to link isolated subdivisions may help explain its popularity.

It is important to remember that the needs and desires of people and families change over time, and that what was preferred in neighborhoods during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s may be found lacking in important ways at the turn of the century. With no room to build new communities, it is important that existing neighborhoods have the flexibility to adapt to the needs of modern homeowners and renters. The older, pedestrian-scale areas are exhibiting a remarkable adaptability to changes in social circumstances as evidenced by their rejuvenation more than 50 years after their establishment. A greater challenge facing Pinellas County and its municipalities is going to be ensuring that as the post-World War II subdivisions, condominiums, and apartment complexes age that they too can successfully adapt to the changing needs of the renter and homebuyer. The characteristics that distinguish these communities – uniform housing types, oriented
toward the needs of the automobile rather than the pedestrian, often disconnected from surrounding neighborhoods by cul-de-sacs and walls – may require different approaches to what has worked in rejuvenating communities created in the first half of the Twentieth Century. One common characteristic of most post-World War II subdivisions is that they are composed solely of private dwellings and lack shared public spaces where citizens can feel that they are part of a larger community. As a result, efforts have been taken or are underway throughout Pinellas County to create, or reestablish, public spaces in local communities – whether they are linear trails, parks, natural areas, and recreational facilities, town centers, or even the humble sidewalk. These efforts should continue to be encouraged and supported.

**Renaissance of Urban and Town Centers**

Cities, towns, and unincorporated communities throughout Pinellas County are restoring their historic downtowns or “main streets”. In a few cases, communities are even creating such places where none existed before. What explains this interest, commitment, and investment (both public and private) in areas that had fallen on hard times after businesses had gravitated to locations along the major road corridors and to the regional malls? One answer, though by no means the complete answer, is that residents and visitors to Pinellas County and its cities are looking for places that help to define a community, that provide a place where the community can gather informally and also traverse easily and safely on foot or bicycle. It is no accident that these places are being created by recycling the earliest centers of the numerous settlements that sprang up around Pinellas County. Figure 9 shows the location of these local efforts to create community focal points; it looks very similar to a prior map (Figure 1) except that the railroad has been replaced by the Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail. While similar efforts are occurring in counties around the country, the dispersed historic settlement pattern in Pinellas provided the opportunity for recreating numerous, distinct local “main streets” and downtowns throughout the County - and that is what is happening. Simultaneous efforts are underway in St. Petersburg, Clearwater, Gulfport, St. Pete Beach, Madeira Beach, Seminole, Pinellas Park, Largo, Indian Shores, Indian Rocks Beach, Safety Harbor, Dunedin, Oldsmar, Tarpon Springs, and Downtown Palm Harbor in unincorporated Pinellas County. Local communities can learn and benefit from each other as these areas redevelop.

These ongoing efforts to create, or recreate, a lively and dynamic downtown, main street, or town center often include developing a plan that takes a comprehensive look at how to revitalize the area. Such plans usually include residential uses as well as commercial, office, and institutional uses. The redevelopment programs in St. Petersburg and Dunedin have resulted in the construction of new multi-family and attached single-family townhouse projects while plans are underway for similar higher density residential development in downtown Clearwater and downtown Largo. These revitalized urban areas create a conducive environment for the type of residential development where services and amenities are often within walking distance. They become areas of concentration within a county of mostly lower density single-family residential neighborhoods. Such areas are important to the livability of Pinellas County in that they provide the vibrant places (whether large downtowns such as St. Petersburg or smaller
community commercial centers such as Downtown Palm Harbor) where urban life is experienced first-hand on foot. For a large county of roughly 932,000 people, there is a desire for a sense of local identity, for creating places where people can share experiences on a smaller, human scale.

**Matching Development with Natural Resource and Infrastructure Constraints**

Long-term infrastructure planning and decision-making in Pinellas County has been largely based on the future land use pattern as depicted on both County and municipal future land use maps, and on the countywide Future Land Use Plan. This future land use pattern has not changed substantially since the early 1980s when the Board of County Commissioners made several significant policy decisions that would affect the ultimate buildout of the County. For example, a significant decision was made by the Board of County Commissioners to reduce residential densities on the future land use map for much of the unincorporated area, reflecting the Board’s increasing sensitivity to the cumulative and often detrimental impact of development on the County’s natural resources. This was largely based on the results of a multi-jurisdictional planning initiative undertaken by Pinellas County and the local municipalities in the late 1970s to delineate all of the environmentally sensitive lands within Pinellas County. Based on this information, local governments in Pinellas County set aside as preservation lands much of the most environmentally sensitive land in the County. And as the County had done, several of the municipalities also reduced residential densities on their future land use maps in order to protect the important natural resources within their jurisdiction. As much as possible, the County’s efforts have been designed to achieve multiple objectives. For example, in setting aside the preservation lands in north County, and by reducing development densities, the County set about to protect a major wellfield recharge area, to protect a sizable portion of undeveloped native Pinellas habitat from development, and to preserve existing natural floodways for flood protection and storage capability.

This was the beginning of a new era for the County, with environmental protection taking an increasingly important role in the Board’s development review, long range planning and land management programs. The citizens of the County were important partners with the County in this long range planning process as they consistently approved the countywide referenda presented to them by the Board, beginning as early as 1972, to tax themselves for environmental land purchases. Today, the County continues to benefit from the groundwork laid in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The fact that much of the 25 year floodplain in the unincorporated area is now protected from development supports Federal Emergency Management Agency goals and supports County participation in programs to reduce flood insurance rates for home and business owners. The protected floodways, coupled with the extensive amount of environmental lands purchased and managed by the County, the municipalities, and other governments and agencies since the late 1970s allows Pinellas County to boast an internationally recognized passive park, preserve and greenway system. Public projects are now routinely accomplished to achieve multiple objectives, with the new Boca Ciega Millenium Park providing a prime example. Here, the County has acquired and is managing 185 acres of natural lands to support environmental protection and restoration goals, to support standards for the provision of passive parklands to the public, and to enable a major stormwater retrofit project providing water quality treatment to runoff from the surrounding development.
Overall, while Pinellas County remains an urban county, much land has been set aside to provide open space relief from our developed corridors and to support and recognize the County’s commitment to environmental purposes and needs.

To complement planning for environmental purposes, development needed to be directed to those areas where infrastructure could be planned and provided to accommodate anticipated growth. For example, also in the early 1980s, the Board of County Commissioners made a decision to establish the mid-county Gateway Area as a major employment center. Today, the Gateway Area is a major focus of economic development efforts in the County and considerable planning has gone into providing the infrastructure needed to support this development.

Overall, the fact that since the 1980s the County has experienced a largely stable land use pattern has resulted in a consistent foundation for long range infrastructure and resource planning in Pinellas County.

Long range planning for the provision of potable water supply and wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal facilities has been based on meeting the demand associated with this future land use pattern. The same is true for the design of major drainage systems throughout the County. This long-term planning has guided the County’s decisions about where to locate facilities and how big they should be to meet ultimate demand. For potable water resource and facility needs, in particular, the projected demand associated with buildout has regional implications due to the County’s reliance on regional sources and our participation in Tampa Bay Water – a regional water utility.

The need for parkland and recreation facilities is in some measure circumscribed by the residential development anticipated at buildout. To the extent the population at buildout can be anticipated accurately, local governments have a better grasp on the future need for parks and recreation facilities and programs.

Significant planning and expenditures have gone into developing the organizational framework and the infrastructure to support the future vision of the County as depicted on the local and countywide future land use plans. Dramatic changes to this land use pattern would necessarily have to contend with a variety of political, environmental and financial implications. With potable water supply, for example, there are natural, economic, and political constraints on the development of water resources for potable supply. Land use decisions (either individually or cumulatively) that result in significant increases in potable water demand would require planning for additional facilities, and possibly new sources, by the regional water supplier - Tampa Bay Water.

Just as important, increases in residential densities, particularly if those increases were to occur in our most hazardous coastal areas, would exacerbate the County’s emergency sheltering and evacuation situation. There is a deficit of emergency shelter spaces in Pinellas County, and existing development and the peninsular nature of the County make it difficult to solve the evacuation capacity problems on our major evacuation routes. Therefore, it would appear to be poor public policy to support or encourage major changes in land use that would contribute to this existing problem.
It could be argued that the cornerstone to the County’s quality of life is its peninsular location, subtropical climate, and rich natural heritage. But by the late 1960s and early 1970s, little was left of the original landscape and vegetation that first distinguished the peninsula. Prior to the 1970s, the voices calling for protection of the natural environment were too often overshadowed by pressure to develop the peninsula. As a result, the natural environment was often sacrificed to the demands of growth. Beginning in the late 1960s, however, a concern about the health of the natural environment was beginning to sweep the nation. Books like *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson and nationwide events like Earth Day galvanized people across the country to take steps to protect the nation’s natural heritage. Locally, in the late 1960s, residents of the County were becoming organized in their concern over a major environmental issue - the dredging and incremental destruction of Boca Ciega Bay. As a result of this citizen activism and the organized effort to bring attention to environmental protection needs, special legislation prohibiting dredging in Boca Ciega Bay was enacted. Pinellas County was now responding in several ways to this cultural shift directed at concern for the environment. For example, the Red Flag Charrette was a landmark document published in 1972 following a County initiative that brought together governments, environmental interests, architects, planners and private citizens to identify and prioritize environmental lands throughout the County for protection, potential acquisition and environmental management. As an outgrowth of the Charrette, in 1972 the citizens of Pinellas County supported the first referendum (of several) presented to them by the Board to increase ad valorem taxes to purchase parkland and environmentally-sensitive land. In 1974, the Board established the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management, for the first time employing a full staff of environmental professionals. All of these significant events occurred within the three years from 1972 to 1974.

Since then, the Board of County Commissioners, frequently in partnership with the State of Florida and the Southwest Florida Water Management District, have acquired large expanses of native Florida habitat in north Pinellas County, undeveloped barrier islands along the Gulf coast – including Shell Key, Weedon Island properties and nearby wetland areas on Tampa Bay, as well as many smaller natural areas elsewhere. In addition, an exceptional system of passive regional parks and greenways is provided by the County to residents and visitors alike. These important open space areas are constantly being expanded and managed to enhance opportunities for the public to enjoy the out-of-doors, and, within the natural preserves, to experience the natural landscape and environment of Pinellas County. When these natural areas and open spaces are combined with the many parks and natural lands properties owned and managed by the municipal governments, and with privately-owned recreational facilities, the resulting overall open space network is shown in Figure 2. This network covers roughly one-fifth of the County, yet only begins to hint at what Pinellas County would have looked like if more attention had been paid in earlier decades to designing and building its communities in harmony with the natural landscape as advocated by John Nolen in 1923.

Mr. Nolen was an influential city planner during the early decades of the Twentieth Century whose pioneering work had considerable impact on this relatively new discipline. In the 1923 regional plan for Pinellas County and in the 1923 comprehensive plan for St. Petersburg, Nolen and his firm proposed preserving flood-prone wetlands and creating a system of interconnected parks and nature preserves. In Nolen’s plan for St.
Petersburg, parkways and landscaped boulevards were also included. Implementation of this plan would have allowed the urban and natural landscapes to mesh gracefully. Instead much of the subsequent urbanization throughout the County took place at the expense of the natural environment.

The efforts that started in the 1970s to “naturalize” the County’s urban environment continue today and are exemplified by County and municipal programs to acquire open space and environmental lands, through the recent establishment of the County’s Division of Environmental Land Management, through capital commitments to landscaping road corridors, through programs directed at ongoing parkland acquisition and development, through capital commitments and programs for the management and restoration of degraded natural habitats, through innovative land development regulations intended to protect natural areas from inappropriate development activity, through commitments to a network of connected recreational and environmental greenways - helping to link natural systems and neighborhoods, and through County and municipal commitments to interpretive environmental education activities promoting environmental stewardship. Today, significant amounts of local and State-awarded funding are directed towards protecting and restoring Pinellas County’s rich natural heritage. In fact, working hard to overcome what was allowed to occur in the past, Pinellas County has become a recognized environmental leader and innovator, in partnership with the surrounding municipalities.

An ongoing commitment remains necessary to continue making progress on the protection and restoration of the County’s natural environment, and to reestablish cooling greenery in areas where it was extinguished years ago. The local government programs to landscape road corridors hold considerable promise in “naturalizing” urban areas since residents and visitors regularly travel these corridors. Trees and other vegetation have a tremendous ability to soften and bring character to the repetitious, bland, and often ugly landscapes along our roadways.

Housing

One of the potential repercussions from achieving buildout is that the cost of housing will escalate leaving segments of the population behind in their ability to afford adequate housing. In the fourth quarter of 1998, the National Association of Home Builders ranked 186 metro areas in the United States according to the affordability of their housing markets. The Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater Metropolitan area placed in the middle of the rankings with 71.4 percent of the homes sold during that quarter that could be afforded by a median income household in the metro area. Most other Florida metro areas also fell into this middle ground. The least affordable housing markets were located on the west coast of the country, particularly in California and Oregon.

While the current housing market is relatively affordable to most segments of the population, housing information compiled by the Pinellas County Planning Department since 1990 highlights the fact that practically all of the new housing is out of reach for very low, low, and even moderate income households. For example, in 1999 the median sale price of new single-family housing in Pinellas County was $168,550, and the figure for new condominium units was $145,500. The median sale price for existing housing was $89,500 for single-family homes and $67,000 for condominium units – approximately half the median cost of new housing. Fortunately, new housing is still
affordable to most median income households in Pinellas County, but for many low and moderate income households, buying a new home is generally not an option; they must restrict their search to the existing housing market. As the number of new housing units coming on the market in Pinellas County continues to decline as vacant developable land becomes increasingly scarce, the demand for existing homes is likely to go up as long as Pinellas remains an attractive place to live. This would put upward pressure on existing home prices, further restricting the housing options for low income, and perhaps some moderate income, households. Yet, if Pinellas County is to flourish in the coming decades, local governments and housing providers must remain vigilant to ensure that all segments of the population can find adequate and affordable housing within the County. Companies wishing to expand operations in the County, or to relocate here, will want to know that all of their employees can find housing within a reasonable distance of the workplace. A full range of housing affordable to all income groups needs to be provided, from upscale homes for the executives to more modest housing for the majority of the employees.

Those agencies and private companies engaged in providing infill housing affordable to low and moderate income households face many challenges. Sometimes success is based on forging public-private partnerships, at other times it is based on a private company developing a strategy that responds to the unique demands of constructing infill affordable housing. But even projects that are not directly subsidized by the public can benefit from local government infrastructure investments such as paving roads and putting in curbs and gutters. One way to build less expensive homes is to build them smaller. The same quality materials and techniques used in larger homes can be used, but the smaller size lowers the cost of the home. Homes have increased in size over the years such that the median size of a new single-family home in 1999 (2,177 square feet) was considerably larger than the 1,356 square feet found in the typical existing single-family home in the resale market. A similar disparity exists between new and existing condominium units. Well-designed and constructed smaller homes, however, have several advantages: they are cheaper to heat and cool, they are cheaper to construct, and they can be placed on smaller lots. Since land is a major component of the expense of constructing a home in Pinellas County, reducing the lot size should reduce the price. There are older platted areas in the County that contain small lots, which provide opportunities for constructing smaller, less expensive, but well-constructed homes.

At the same time that limited numbers of new homes are being constructed for low and moderate income households, market forces are working to reduce the number of existing units affordable to these same households. One example is the impact buildout is having on mobile homes. Mobile homes represent an affordable housing option for tens of thousands of permanent and seasonal residents in Pinellas County. The total number of mobile homes in the County (estimated at 56,000 units) is the highest for any county within the State of Florida. In the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, mobile home parks were often built along roadways that have subsequently been upgraded to major multi-lane facilities. During these decades, several mobile home communities were also constructed at choice waterfront locations. The demand for waterfront sites and for commercial property along major roadways has so dramatically increased the value of land under some mobile home parks that the parks are being converted to other uses, such as expensive waterfront housing or commercial development. This conversion has usually been confined to older mobile home parks, but as the age of mobile home parks continues to increase and the value of their land soars, Pinellas is likely to see increasing numbers of mobile homes
being lost to other uses. This is an issue that has drawn the attention of the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners. In response, the Board has concluded an effort to determine what options are available to the County for ensuring that redevelopment projects are not injurious to the lives of mobile home residents. Pinellas County has also set in motion a program to monitor the annual loss of mobile homes to get some indication of the significance of mobile home losses on the County’s housing stock.

In the third quarter of 1999, a survey conducted by the Bay Area Apartment Associates revealed an overall vacancy rate of less than four percent among the major apartment rental complexes throughout Pinellas County. A similar survey in 1994 produced comparable results. These consistently low vacancy rates are evidence of pent-up demand for new rental apartments. The impending buildout of Pinellas County, however, has resulted in very few sites remaining available for multi-family development. This tension between demand and site availability for multi-family housing is having several results: for example, much of the new multi-family housing is higher-end development, and residential developers are beginning to compete with office and retail developers for redevelopment of obsolete buildings that have favorable location, zoning, and impact fee credits. One example of this phenomenon is the recent demolition of Sunshine Mall in Clearwater and its replacement with three apartment complexes.

**Mobility**

Mobility and accessibility have played crucial roles in the urban growth of Pinellas County. It was the extension of railroads to the peninsula in the late 19th Century that made the area accessible and stimulated an interest in urban development that continues to this day. It was the railroad that tied the numerous small villages, towns, and cities together; today that function is performed by an extensive road network. Pinellas County, the State of Florida, the federal government, and, to a lesser extent, the municipalities continue to expend considerable resources in expanding, upgrading, and maintaining this road network. From 1990 to 1999, approximately $387.8 million dollars were invested by just the County’s road program, and an additional $301.3 million is planned through the Year 2010. When the federal, state, and municipal road programs are added, the total financial commitment is considerable. Much of the County’s road program during the 1990s was funded by the Penny for Pinellas infrastructure sales tax, and the resulting road improvements were in large measure an effort to catch up with the transportation demands resulting from prior land development.

But the need to move people and goods within the County is only one variable in the urban equation. Residents are increasingly speaking out when they perceive that transportation improvements would adversely affect the livability of their neighborhoods. Those amenities and characteristics that distinguish a community (e.g. tree-lined avenues, narrow, pedestrian-scale streets) can be lost or severely compromised if road projects are not planned and designed to protect and, when possible, enhance these community characteristics. If, as said earlier, neighborhoods are the lifeblood of cities, then actions that debilitate neighborhoods should be avoided.

A change in perspective is slowly occurring in highway planning and design. No longer is the focus restricted to the movement of traffic as quickly and efficiently as funds allow. In some situations, these objectives may still take precedence, but in an increasing number of situations, the complex interrelationship between the road and the surrounding
community is also being considered. Roads must fit into and support the overall goals for the community, whether that be historic and/or community preservation, the revitalization of downtown, providing a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment, or preserving the natural environment. These additional objectives for road projects have resulted in changes to the County’s road program and have altered original plans for certain road corridors. For example, the Board of County Commissioners has committed approximately $12 million through 2010 to landscape major portions of the County’s roadway network. Roads can and should be attractive as well as functional. Pinellas County has also modified some road projects in response to neighborhood opposition; in some cases the planned road improvements have been scaled back to be compatible with the surrounding community, in other cases the road project was dropped altogether. Expansion of the County’s scenic/non-commercial corridor program is one more way to help ensure that selected roadways remain compatible with the surrounding community; in 1999, the Board of County Commissioners designated an additional three roadways as scenic/non-commercial corridors. Their locations in south, mid-, and north Pinellas reveal the broad based interest in this issue throughout the County.

A further change in road planning is that roads are no longer designed solely for the automobile. The routine inclusion of bike lanes and sidewalks helps to ensure that other modes of travel are encouraged and provided for. As Pinellas County achieves buildout and must rely upon established neighborhoods to entice people and businesses to stay in the County, effective integration of the roadway network into the community will further enhance the County’s livability and reputation as a quality urban environment.

If historic trends are an accurate indication, as population growth in Pinellas County slows over the next few years, the growth in demand on the transportation system will not decrease proportionately. Information provided by the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida shows the number of vehicle miles traveled in Pinellas County rose by more than 16 percent from 1990 to 1997, while the population increased by only six percent. A combination of factors yields these results: for example, as the road network is improved, people tend to drive more; as Pinellas urbanizes, those wanting less expensive new homes or very large lots move to adjacent counties and commute to their jobs in Pinellas.

For most of the Twentieth Century, Pinellas County relied almost solely on the automobile for mobility. By the end of the Century, private automobiles accounted for roughly 99 percent of all trips within the County; the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (the County’s public transit bus system) captured less than one percent of the trips – a percentage that has been decreasing over the years. In looking at the future of transportation in Pinellas, community leaders are having to adapt transportation solutions to an urbanized county that has relied on the automobile for mobility, enabling establishment of a low-density land use pattern served by highway commercial development throughout most of the County. Some of the most vexing transportation problems arise when a roadway corridor is expected to serve several functions, such as U.S. Highway 19. U.S. Highway 19 serves not only as the main north-south transportation corridor for inter-county travel, but it is also an economic engine of considerable importance for north Pinellas County. Thirty nine percent of all jobs in Pinellas County north of S.R. 580 are associated with businesses located along U.S. Highway 19, and almost fifty percent of all commercial jobs in north Pinellas County are found here. This concentration of economic activity is partly the result of a policy
decision by the Board of County Commissioners in the late 1970s to restrain commercial activity within the numerous residential subdivisions that were replacing the area’s citrus groves, and to encourage it to occur along U.S. Highway 19. As a result, retail, office, and even industrial employment centers created a linear economic corridor along U.S. Highway 19 in response to the good accessibility provided by this highway and the policy support provided by the County’s growth management plan. But the transportation needs of shoppers, adjacent businesses, commuters, and through traffic are often at odds. Shoppers making short trips to the grocery store or dry cleaners interfere with commuters and freight-carrying trucks that are using the highway to reach more distant destinations. The issues surrounding U.S. Highway 19 highlight how difficult it is for a highway to provide conflicting functions. It is likely that solutions will result not only in redesign of the highway, but in changes to the adjacent land use pattern. The proposed grade-separated interchanges at major intersections and the construction of service roads will impair the visibility of some properties from the highway. The accessibility of these properties, however, may actually be improved by the interchanges, making them ideal locations for land uses that require ready access to U.S. Highway 19, but are not as dependent on having good visibility from the highway.

Will providing alternative modes of travel other than the existing bus system reduce the County’s heavy reliance on the automobile for getting around? Nationwide, cities are relying more on the automobile and less and less on mass transit. There are several reasons for this, and it is not the purpose of this report to discuss them in detail. The Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization is currently evaluating different public mass transit alternatives to the automobile. The alternatives include an elevated guideway system and light rail at ground level. These systems are very expensive and any decision to proceed with one or both of these alternative technologies must compare the cost with the benefits to the overall transportation system in the County. Pinellas County is also identified as the western terminus for the State’s high speed rail system. High speed rail would connect Pinellas County with other major destinations in west, central, and southeast Florida. It is not possible for public transit to provide the flexibility, convenience, and choice afforded by the private automobile. This choice includes decisions on how and where people live – often in lower density housing in single-family neighborhoods. The anticipated growth pattern in Pinellas County following buildout is not expected to significantly increase overall population densities, which will continue to challenge those responsible for providing mass transit services.

A strong case can be made that Pinellas County would do well to surmount the obstacles to improving and expanding mass transit service to residents and businesses. Actual and perceived problems in getting around in Pinellas County can have a substantial impact on the desirability of the peninsula as a place of residence and business. Providing viable options to the automobile as the almost sole means of moving people in the County will require rethinking the prevailing relationship between home, work, services, and other everyday activities and the way that the land use pattern and transportation system tie them together. One oft repeated dictum is that higher densities and more intense employment centers are necessary to support mass transit alternatives to the automobile. If true, then what would be the extent and location of these higher densities and more intensive land uses, since they come with the cost of providing more schools, recreation facilities, potable water, and sewer treatment facilities in a county where land for these purposes is in short supply? As in all complex systems - and a modern urban environment is extremely complex - changes instituted to achieve one objective or
resolve a specific problem can have numerous consequences – good and bad, intended or unintended.

Pinellas County has been a leader in the development of bicycle and pedestrian trails in an urban environment. Once thought of as primarily a recreational amenity, the Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail, constructed on a former railroad right-of-way spanning the length of the County, has increasingly become a transportation corridor that is used by people for reaching destinations associated with their jobs and for everyday activities such as shopping, visiting friends, attending school, etc. In 1999, these types of trips accounted for roughly 45 percent of all travel on the Trail. The Pinellas Trail is 35 miles in length and contains several pedestrian flyovers so that users can safely cross the most heavily traveled roadways. Current construction plans will increase the length of the Pinellas Trail to 47 miles in the next two years. Another significant step in the County’s trail program is the 1999 agreement between the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners and the Florida Power Corporation to locate a bicycle and pedestrian trail along an electrical power transmission corridor. The first agreement of its kind in the State of Florida, the resulting eastern trail segment, when connected to the existing Pinellas Trail, will result in a trail network of approximately 80 miles - almost forming a complete loop around the County. A Trail Plan adopted by the Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization will pursue development of a trail network of almost 200 miles using the Pinellas Trail (including the eastern segment along the power corridor) as the backbone. This effort will result in a major transportation network that provides one alternative to the automobile for getting around. As this trail network expands, it will increasingly link residential, commercial, employment, and recreational uses and enable an increasing number of people to reach destinations by means other than their cars.

**Remaining Competitive in the Regional and Global Economy**

Buildout confronts Pinellas County and its municipalities with one obvious resource constraint – the lack of large tracts of raw undeveloped land. Businesses desiring to locate in Pinellas County will find it necessary to redevelop property or reuse and renovate existing structures. While this can often prove to be more expensive than building on raw undeveloped land on the edges of the metropolitan area, this additional cost can be offset by providing businesses and their employees with amenities, resources, services, and a quality of life that sets Pinellas County apart from other areas. Redevelopment of commercial and industrial properties may also need to be supplemented with assistance from the public sector, such as in the cleanup of contaminated sites.

Continued growth in the knowledge-based sector of the County’s economy will depend in large measure on the supply of skilled workers. At the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, the lack of adequately trained workers is perhaps the greatest hindrance to economic growth in Pinellas County and the metro area. A look at Table 7 tells part of the story. The educational attainment of the work force is one indicator of a county’s, or a metro area’s, ability to retain and attract technology and other knowledge-based firms. In 1990 and 2000, the percentage of those Pinellas residents twenty-five years of age or older who had graduated from high school was slightly higher than the averages for the State of Florida and for the entire United States, and it was slightly lower than the percentages for several of the counties that have been experiencing significant growth in
high technology jobs. When comparing the percentages of those who had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher level of education, however, Pinellas County is found to fall considerably behind the bastions of high technology. Pinellas County’s 18.5 percent and 23.4 percent figures for 1990 and 2000 are below the national average and considerably below other areas where high technology contributes significantly to the regional economy.

A highly trained and educated workforce is one of the key resources that can make Pinellas County attractive to businesses that provide high paying and challenging jobs. Providing this workforce presents a great challenge to the community, and one of the key ingredients is a quality secondary education and the presence of quality institutions to pursue post-secondary education. Figure 10 identifies those institutions in the Tampa Bay area that provide either an Associate Degree or a higher degree.

Many of the knowledge-based jobs associated with the newer technologies are located in the services sector of the economy. The services sector, however, also includes jobs that are relatively low-wage and low-skill. Over the past several years, all components of the County’s service economy have experienced growth, some more than others (e.g. the substantial increase in business services was mentioned above). Success in creating and attracting knowledge-based service jobs will depend on the quality of the County’s workforce and the quality of life provided by the County and its various communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Educational Attainment (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High School Graduate or More</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinellas County, FL</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Co., NY (Manhattan)</td>
<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara, Co., CA (Silicon Valley)</td>
<td>82.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange Co., CA</td>
<td>81.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver Co., CO</td>
<td>79.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis, Co., TX (Austin Area)</td>
<td>83.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfax, Co., VA</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlington, Co., VA</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Co., WA (Seattle Area)</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Educational attainment is for those persons 25 years of age or older.
The quality of the workforce is a reflection of the local educational systems (both public and private) and the ability to attract educated and trained workers and their families into the area. Providing a quality of life that convinces residents and businesses to stay in Pinellas County and induces others to move here will be an ongoing challenge that must be accepted by the community, business leaders, local governments, neighborhoods, and individual citizens if Pinellas County is to remain successful in the long run.

Fortunately, Pinellas County’s economy over the past several years has increasingly become diversified as manufacturing, electronic components, medical instruments and other high technology firms have taken their place beside the large number of businesses providing services to other businesses and to the residents and the numerous tourists who visit the County. In fact, even the Pinellas tourism industry is diversifying as it expands its destination assets beyond the County’s outstanding beaches and excellent year-round weather to include a wide selection of natural, cultural and historic attractions. This diversification is enabling the County to capitalize on an increasing interest among visitors in cultural/heritage tourism and ecotourism. As it now stands, tourism remains a major industry in Pinellas County with some 4.5 million visitors spending $2.3 billion in 1998. So at the beginning of the Twenty first Century, as at the opening of the previous century, tourism has a major role in the local economy. It has been noted in a recent assessment of the tourism industry that Pinellas County has two unique appeals – its beaches and its relaxed and diverse cultural charm. Successfully responding to the other challenges of buildout already discussed in this report will not only reinforce these appealing qualities of the County, but will also enable the County and municipalities to address some of the weaknesses identified in the assessment (i.e. outdated accommodation properties and retail strip centers, inefficient public transportation linkages, and blighted commercial areas).
FIGURE 10
Public Community Colleges and Institutions Offering Bachelor’s Degrees or Higher

Click to View Map
WORKING PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE DECISIONS ON BUILDOUT

As Pinellas County transitions to a buildout condition, some of the issues of the past will metamorphose in ways that will require new or modified directions in public policy. It is also true that buildout is giving rise to new challenges that must also be accounted for when establishing public policy directed toward creating a quality urban environment that is sustainable over time. It is important, therefore, that public policy be adaptable and responsive to the needs of Pinellas County as the focus shifts from rapid growth to infill development and redevelopment. The following working principles will serve as a guide for public policy and program decisions by the Board of County Commissioners in anticipating and responding to issues associated with buildout. These principles will also guide urban planning, design, and development.

General

1. As Pinellas County achieves buildout and the focus shifts to infill development within existing urban areas and redevelopment, no community should be left behind economically and socially. No neighborhood should be allowed to deteriorate.

2. Pinellas County must work cooperatively with other governments and agencies when developing strategies to address issues arising from buildout conditions.

3. As the urban boundaries of the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater Metro Area continue to expand outward from the historic focus on Tampa Bay, Pinellas County must remain active at the regional level to ensure that the County remains a dynamic participant in decisions on the region’s future.

4. Pinellas County will ensure that there are open channels of communication between County government and citizens so that community concerns and interests are heard and taken into consideration when decisions are made that impact residents and businesses of Pinellas County.

Urban Communities

1. A distinguishing characteristic of Pinellas County is the presence of a diverse mix of cities, small towns and suburban communities on a small peninsula. This variety of urban environments provides people with a
choice of lifestyles, and retaining and enhancing these distinctive community characteristics will ensure that they remain vital and successful communities.

2. To improve Pinellas County’s appeal as a place to live and work, it will be necessary for the public and private sectors to focus more resources on improving the quality of the urban experience and the natural environment. Public policy should emphasize the importance of protecting and promoting community character, supporting economic development, and enhancing the lives of all segments of the County’s population.

3. Pinellas County will continue to support efforts to create, or recreate, lively and dynamic areas of mixed-use. Revitalization efforts have so far focused primarily on historic downtowns, neighborhood commercial centers, and older commercial corridors. These revitalized mixed-use areas provide vibrant places where urban life can be experienced first-hand on foot. They also create a conducive environment for the type of residential development where services and amenities are often within walking distance.

4. Pinellas County recognizes that successful neighborhoods are central to the quality of life in Pinellas County. Therefore, redevelopment and urban infill should not compromise the integrity and viability of existing residential neighborhoods.

5. When considering ways to encourage neighborhood enhancement and rejuvenation, it is important that such efforts are compatible with community character, local traditions and heritage, infrastructure capacities, the natural environment, and the overall vision for the community.

6. As Pinellas County moves toward buildout, conflicts between land uses have the potential to increase as development activity shifts to redevelopment and infill urban development. To minimize the potential for conflicts, Pinellas County should ensure that its revitalization and redevelopment plans, codes and public participation procedures provide effective guidance for change in a highly urbanized county.

7. Pinellas County will work with communities to create, reestablish, or expand public spaces in neighborhoods – whether they be linear recreational trails, parks, public open spaces, shoreline access, revitalized “main street” commercial centers, or even sidewalks. These
shared public spaces can link neighborhoods together and provide a common area where people can feel they are part of a larger community.

8. Pinellas County will continue its program, in cooperation with other local governments, agencies, and interested citizens, to establish an interconnected system of greenways and blueways throughout the County that includes public parks, natural systems, waterways, river and creek corridors, waterfront and shoreline properties, pedestrian/bicycle trails, and other open space areas. Making these open space and natural areas accessible to the public enables residents and visitors to experience nature within the urban environment.

9. To maximize the potential of the pedestrian/bicycle trails throughout the County, planning and design for development and redevelopment will be encouraged to recognize the trail system as an additional transportation network within the County.

10. The natural surroundings are important in defining a community’s character. Development and redevelopment should respect these natural surroundings, and when at all possible, enhance and restore the area’s natural resources. The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners will continue to take a lead role in managing the larger natural areas in the County, such as the Brooker Creek Preserve and the Weedon Island Preserve. Public access to natural areas will be managed so that it does not adversely impact the environmental integrity of these natural systems.

11. One challenge facing Pinellas County and its municipalities is ensuring that as the post-World War II subdivisions, condominiums, and apartment complexes age that they are able to successfully adapt to the changing needs of the homebuyer and renter. Pinellas County must be sensitive to these changing needs and be a facilitator in helping change to occur in a manner that is compatible with a community’s character and vision for the future.

12. The roadway network encompasses a substantial portion of the County’s land area; as such, roads and their adjacent land uses have a large impact in how people perceive Pinellas County. Therefore, the County’s scenic/non-commercial corridor program will continue to be supported and implemented. The application of this program will be applied even at the neighborhood level where there are important local characteristics (e.g., extensive tree cover or a rural character) within the corridor that the community desires to preserve.
13. The road network in Pinellas County should present a safe and attractive landscape to pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers. Whenever appropriate, roadway landscaping should promote community identity and encourage pedestrian activity.

14. Pinellas County should promote revitalization of those land use corridors along the County’s roadways that suffer from inefficient road access conditions, obsolete land development patterns, changes in demographics, and inadequate building maintenance.

15. Plans for redevelopment and infill development should be cognizant of, and compatible with, the limitations imposed by urban infrastructure systems, the County’s susceptibility to natural disasters, and the region’s natural resources, such as potable water supplies.

16. Pinellas County’s appeal as a place to live and work is in part dependent upon the variety and quality of the region’s cultural resources (e.g., libraries, museums, performing arts centers, cultural heritage events). The community, therefore, must continue to invest in, and support, these cultural resources and events.

**Housing**

1. A broad range of housing affordable to all income groups needs to be provided so that households of various incomes are able to reside throughout Pinellas County to support the local economy. As buildout is reached and Pinellas County continues to be a desirable place to live, there will be limited opportunities for the provision of additional housing and therefore a strong demand for existing dwelling units. This is likely to exert upward pressure on housing prices and rents.

2. Urban planning must take into account the housing needs of those who are susceptible to displacement by redevelopment. This includes those living in modestly priced homes on valuable real estate that will be under pressure to be converted to other uses due to market forces. In some situations it may be necessary to preserve such dwellings in order to ensure that housing remains affordable to all income groups.

3. Opportunities for additional housing can occur when changes in local demographics and market conditions create redevelopment scenarios where housing replaces other types of land uses, such as obsolete commercial development.
4. The location and density of housing must respect the restrictions imposed by the County’s susceptibility to natural disasters.

Natural Heritage

1. Pinellas County’s rich natural heritage is part of the foundation for the quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors, while the area’s natural amenities and peninsular location have played a central role in defining the County’s image. Pinellas County will, therefore, continue to naturalize the urban environment through programs to acquire and manage open space and environmental lands, to restore degraded natural habitats, to landscape road corridors, to develop new parkland, to protect natural areas from inappropriate development activity, and to provide greenways that tie together natural systems and neighborhoods.

2. Historically, Pinellas County has largely developed on the strength of its attractive natural amenities. An awareness of these features and their protection, restoration, and management should remain at the forefront of all planning efforts aimed at enhancing the County’s quality of life. Toward this end, Pinellas County will continue its commitment to wise stewardship of the peninsula’s natural amenities through the development of environmental education centers and programs that will further the public’s understanding of, and appreciation for, the area’s natural environment.

3. The 35 miles of sandy beaches on the Gulf coast represent the County’s most recognized natural and recreational resource, and the basis for a multi-billion dollar tourism industry. Pinellas County will continue to take a lead role in protecting and restoring the natural resource systems associated with sandy beaches and ensuring that there is adequate public access to the County’s beaches and shoreline.

4. Pinellas County and its municipalities must seriously consider the impact of their decisions on regional resources such as potable water supplies and the Tampa Bay estuary in order not to compromise the elaborate multi-jurisdictional agreements that have been established to manage these resources.

Mobility

1. Roads must fit into and support the overall goals of the community, whether they are historic and/or community preservation, the
revitalization of downtown, providing a safe, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood, or preserving the natural environment. The movement of traffic as quickly and efficiently as possible will not be the sole criterion for planning and designing road projects.

2. Viable transportation alternatives will reduce dependence upon the automobile for moving people about the county and region. These transportation alternatives include transit, pedestrian, and bicycle systems and will be effectively integrated into the overall transportation network to maximize access and use by residents and visitors for all types of trips.

3. Greenways, sidewalks, and multi-use trails will connect neighborhoods and communities with employment, retail, educational, cultural, and recreational centers and with other neighborhoods.

4. Transportation improvements will support pedestrian enhancements and alternative modes of travel such as bicycle use. Streets should be safe, comfortable, and interesting to the pedestrian and bicyclist.

5. Pinellas County must remain effectively integrated into the regional transportation network so that people, goods and services can easily access the region’s top-notch airports and highway system.

**Economy**

1. With the recognition that competition in the global economy is increasingly being conducted at the regional level, Pinellas County will promote and support public policy and economic strategies that enhance the Tampa Bay region’s competitiveness in the marketplace.

2. Economic development should support the overall aspirations of the community. Economic development is not an end in itself, but a means to help achieve a sustainable community and the quality of life desired by the County’s citizens.

3. Achieving a sustainable community and the quality of life desired by the County’s citizens is dependent upon continued growth in both the size and quality of the local economy. In order to attain this level of economic growth, Pinellas County will take steps to retain and recruit industries and businesses with high-wage jobs that bring money into the local economy from outside the County.
4. The intensity of development on a site should be compatible with restrictions imposed by the natural environment and the characteristics of the local community.

5. While the mid-county Gateway area will continue to serve as a major employment center for Pinellas County and the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater Metro Area, Pinellas County will continue to support a land use pattern that disperses employment opportunities throughout the County so that residents are able to work close to home.

6. In order for Pinellas County to remain competitive in the regional and global economy, the County must educate, attract, and retain a well-trained workforce. This requires a commitment to provide the following: an excellent K-12 educational system available to all students, quality post-secondary educational institutions, and job-training programs to supplement these secondary and post-secondary educational programs.

7. Pinellas County and its municipalities must work together to support the tourism industry in Pinellas County. Redevelopment and infill development associated with buildout conditions provide opportunities to enhance Pinellas County’s image as a tourist destination by improving or replacing outdated and blighted retail strip centers, tourist accommodations, and commercial areas.

8. When properly planned, managed, and coordinated, Pinellas County’s natural, cultural, scenic, and historic resources expand the range of experiences and activities available to residents and tourists visiting this urban county. This has the positive effect of increasing the County’s tourist base.
APPENDIX A: Short History of Urban Development in Pinellas County, Florida

Pinellas is a small peninsula roughly 34.5 miles in length and 5.2 to 15 miles in width. This fact of geography has had a tremendous influence on the history of the County. First of all there are few counties or cities in the United States that are located on a peninsula. Portland, Maine; Charleston, South Carolina; and San Francisco may come to mind, but there are few others. This small fraternity of peninsular counties and cities means that their defining characteristics are shared by few others. For example, the surrounding shoreline helps to physically define, and at the same time separate, the peninsula from surrounding areas. The close proximity to the Gulf beaches and coastal waters has made Pinellas County a popular destination for tourists, retirees, and others who value ready accessibility to gulf beaches and coastal waters, or at least a view of these amenities.

Initially, the peninsula was occupied for centuries by Native Americans. The initial European settlers, however, found the Pinellas peninsula to be extremely remote and access was difficult. Farming sustained the pioneers of Pinellas, and water was their only link with what little civilization existed elsewhere in Florida. The first communities in Pinellas, therefore, were located on sites conducive to agriculture and on sheltered coastal areas convenient to boats.

It wasn’t until 1887 that the Orange Belt Railroad arrived to end the isolation of the Pinellas peninsula from the rest of Florida. Until that time, the easiest way to enter or leave the peninsula was by boat. The arrival of the Orange Belt Railway, and later the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad, along with the dissemination of a leading doctor’s conclusion in 1885 that the Pinellas peninsula was the healthiest place on earth, precipitated a movement of people from colder climes to the Pinellas peninsula. Most of these people settled in St. Petersburg, which was at the terminus of the railroad. But in addition to St. Petersburg, other small settlements were established in the peninsula. These were located, with few exceptions, on the coast reflecting their primary means of outside contact prior to the railroads. Examples of these communities include Gulfport (then Disston City), Clearwater, Anona, Dunedin, Ozona, Tarpon Springs, Bayview, and Safety Harbor. After the arrival of the railroads, these communities continued to grow, albeit slowly, and a few small towns were established away from the coast along one of the railroads, often serving as centers for the local citrus industry (Largo is an example).

It is important to understand that, unlike development on the east side of Tampa Bay, which was concentrated around the Port of Tampa, settlement in the Pinellas peninsula was more dispersed since there was no single economic catalyst such as a major port that focused and concentrated settlement in one area. In Pinellas County the economic catalysts at the end of the Nineteenth Century and in the early Twentieth Century were the citrus industry, tourism, and the sponge industry (the latter focused on the community of Tarpon Springs), which allowed for a dispersed settlement pattern among small towns throughout the peninsula. These three elements of the local economy did not depend on access to the urban services provided by large towns and cities resulting in a settlement pattern of dispersed small towns and villages in Pinellas by the beginning of the Twentieth Century. There was no city whose direct or indirect influence was felt through the length and breadth of the peninsula. By the 1920s, the barrier islands began to be
settled, their narrow linear geography encouraging several discrete communities including Pass-a-Grille, Indian Shores, and Clearwater Beach. It was this dispersed settlement pattern that has had such a marked impact on the County’s existing urban environment and system of governance. The diversity is seen not only in the variety of communities but in the large number of local governments.

The lack of an adequate road system was a principal cause for the creation of Pinellas County when it split away from Hillsborough County in 1912. The deficient road system was one consequence of having politicians in Tampa making decisions on how to spend tax dollars collected across the Bay. After secession was effected, a road building program during the 1910s and 1920s further connected the numerous Pinellas communities and helped enable them to grow until the 1926 land bust and the Great Depression put a stop to economic growth and noticeably slowed development.

By the time growth resumed after World War II, the economic underpinnings of the local economy had changed. While tourism was still important, the citrus industry was declining and being replaced by retirees and manufacturing as major components of the local economy. A surge of development occurred throughout the County as the numerous small towns and cities established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries began to expand outward eventually coalescing into a large urban area covering almost four fifths of the County at the end of the 20th Century. The residential development consisted primarily of single-family dwellings on separate lots, while commercial development eschewed the historic downtown areas for the new and upgraded roadway corridors. In these respects Pinellas County’s development followed a pattern similar to other urbanizing areas around the country. Primarily shaped by the requirements and demands of an automobile-oriented society, Pinellas County’s growth and development exhibited characteristics that have come to exemplify Post-WW II urban areas throughout the United States.

The significant number of retirees who moved to Pinellas County in the decades following World War II have had a tremendous impact on local demographics and the local economy. Those sixty-five years of age and older have represented twenty-five percent or more of the County’s population since at least 1960, resulting in Pinellas County having a median age that ranks as one of the highest in the nation. For example, in 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990 the median age of the County’s population was 44.9, 48.1, 45.8, and 42.0, respectively. This large retiree population in combination with a healthy tourist industry helped to make retail and services the dominant sectors of the local economy.

The manufacturing sector of the Pinellas economy did not develop to any great extent until the advent of the space program in the late 1950s, when new industry, primarily electronic and electronic component firms, began moving to Pinellas, helping to diversify the economy. Although the manufacturing sector grew steadily during the 1960s, the service and trade sectors continued to dominate the County’s economy. The nascent electronics industry of the 1950s has matured in Pinellas County such that 17 percent of all jobs in this industry within the State of Florida were located here in the Year 2000.
The local economy maintained a similar pattern of development throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Many new companies, including high technology firms, were established in Pinellas County or relocated here from other areas. The financial sector, including the insurance and real estate industry, grew to meet the demands resulting from this economic growth and development. The transition from an economic base dominated by the tourism industry and retirees has helped strengthen and diversify the local economy. Additionally, expansion of the technology and services sectors of the economy in Pinellas has created job opportunities that helped attract large numbers of young working-age people. One result is that the County’s median age actually decreased by 3.8 years between 1980 and 1990.
Although Pinellas County is an urban area, it includes neighborhoods that are suburban in character. The elements that distinguish a neighborhood as suburban can be applied in a wide variety of situations, which helps explain the rich diversity of suburbs. Generally, suburbs are predominantly residential areas comprised mainly of individual houses. While the physical character of these neighborhoods is suburban, the way of life they contain is urban. This perspective on the suburban condition is based on the observations of Witold Rybczynski, Professor of Urbanism, University of Pennsylvania.


Personal communication with Ms. Ellyn Kadel, Director of Real Estate Management, Pinellas County General Services Department, Pinellas County, Florida, 1999.

Personal communication with Mr. Brian Smith, Pinellas County Planning Director, Pinellas County, Florida, 1999.


City Life, 186.

U.S. Urbanized Areas 1950-1990, Demographic Briefs and Urban Policy, The Public Purpose. An urbanized area is defined as a densely populated area with a population density of more than 1,000 persons per square mile with a population of more than 50,000. This definition is independent of corporate city or regional government boundaries. A more detailed descriptive definition is provided by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.


This discussion on Arlington County, Virginia is based on information obtained from Arlington County and conversations with staff at the Arlington County Planning Division.

City Life, 227.

An interesting discussion of the Nolen plans for St. Petersburg and Pinellas County is found in R. Bruce Stephenson’s Visions of Eden: environmentalism, urban planning, and city building in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1900-1995 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997).

Association of Homebuilders.


There are some new housing units being constructed that are affordable to low income households, however, the number of units is a small percentage of the total being constructed.


Ibid., pg 17.


The area north of S.R. 580 used in this analysis included the entire City of Oldsmar. The data was compiled by the Pinellas County Planning Department using employment estimates for Traffic Analysis Zones generated in 1998.

For a more thorough discussion of the history of Pinellas County please refer to “Pinellas County Historical Background”, Pinellas County Planning Department, Pinellas County, Florida, April 1995.