

Crystal Beach Community Overlay Document

Boundary of the Community Overlay

Crystal Beach is a small, residential, unincorporated area in northern Pinellas County. It is bordered to the west by St. Joseph's Sound, to the east by U.S. Alternate 19 North, the Pinellas Trail, Avery Bayou, and Sutherland Bayou, to the north by Oceanview Avenue, and Sutherland Bayou and St. Joseph's Sound form the southern border. Exhibit A shows the boundaries of the community.

Community Background

Crystal Beach is one of the original communities in Pinellas County, with homesteading beginning in the 1850's. In 1912, land developers A.D. Powers and J.D. Hanby platted a traditional grid street layout, which included a main boulevard and alleyways that promote connectivity, "leaving a parkway and road along the Gulf so that all residents could have access to the water" ("A History of Crystal Beach", p. 1). That same year, Powers and Hanby established the southern half of the existing Live Oak Park, and in 1914 the community established a post office. In 1923, Faith Mission established a home for disadvantaged children and a residence for the elderly, eventually buying many properties to support its social welfare efforts. Some of this property became the northern half of the existing Live Oak Park. One of Faith Mission's original buildings remains—a 103-year-old building that serves as a Youth Center today.

In addition to Live Oak Park, Powers and Hanby established Gulf Shore Park, which is a waterfront pathway they created to ensure all Crystal Beach residents and visitors alike would have access to the waterfront. Their stated intent was to "forever hold this strip of land as a park for the use of the lot owners and residents of Crystal Beach" (Crystal Beach, Florida: A Better Place to Live", p. 7). Powers and Hanby wrote that no building or development was to take place on this land, referring to it as "the front yard of Crystal Beach."

The area's many environmental features include coastal waters, indigenous marine life, and a largely unsullied natural shoreline along St. Joseph's Sound and into Sutherland and Avery Bayou. It contains wetlands and uplands and their associated vegetation and wildlife, as well as a large population of native birds and waterfowl. Mangroves border a shell path that runs along the Sound. The land to the west of this shell path is public land along its entire length.

Among the approximately 730 Crystal Beach households, there is a strong sense of community identity. Residents encounter each other at the community post office. A community center provides meeting space for arts, crafts, and exercise classes as well as for game nights and organizations such as the fishing club. A Family and Youth Activity Center provides after-school

student supervision and summer YMCA activities. The Pinellas Community Foundation provides a grant to the Center. Residents raise funds for its maintenance and upkeep through the Crystal Beach Annual Chili Cook-off. A thriving non-denominational, waterfront church offers worship services and other activities to the community. Crystal Beach is a golf-cart community and is pedestrian and bicycle friendly.

The Crystal Beach Community Association (CBCA) formed in December 1941. It has been active throughout the years; it continues to be active today. Residents have frequently united to protect and preserve the unique character of Crystal Beach, including organizing an effort in 1974 to prevent the Army Corps of Engineers from depositing dredged material and building a dike at the southern end of the Community and, more recently, voicing opposition against efforts to vacate portions of the public right-of-way that constitutes the waterfront path. The Association funds projects and activities within the Community. It maintains the pier and the waterfront pathway and assists with such things as grass mowing on the public land. A recent project involved renovating the beach area. Fundraising for these efforts takes place through an annual silent auction and an Arts and Craft Festival. Residents contribute volunteer hours for fundraising and for work on such activities as beach cleanup.

Community Overview

Low density, single-family homes predominate the Crystal Beach Community. Smaller, older, well-kept, single-family homes intermix with larger single-family homes of more recent vintage. Limited areas of multi-family housing exist within the Community. Most are duplexes; none exceeds three units. All appear as though they are single-family homes.

Two surveys of historic resources by Pinellas County in 1991 and 1993, identified several historic structures in Crystal Beach, all appearing to date from 1910 to 1930. The majority of them are single-family houses of frame construction designed in the Craftsman or "Bungalow" style. Some areas of the Community have a relatively high density of historic structures; other structures are scattered throughout the Community. Many of these structures contribute to the "Old Florida" feel of Crystal Beach. The alleys between some streets serve as utility easements and are part of the Community's unique character. Commercial businesses are limited to a strip along U.S. Alternate 19, the eastern-most boundary of the Community.

In its comprehensive plan, Pinellas County recognizes that with the County's "sizable population and its associated urban development, areas of pristine natural beauty have become increasingly limited." Considering its small size, Crystal Beach abounds in such areas.

Foundational to the character of Crystal Beach is the long-established, paved and shell pathway and public area along St. Joseph's Sound, bordered by mangroves. This path allows the public—

both residents of and visitors to Crystal Beach—to enjoy peaceful walks along the water. Benches are available. The existence of this path, originally called Gulf Shore Park, upholds the original vision of Hanby and Powers to have it serve as "the front yard of Crystal Beach." There is a natural beach, boat launch area, and a 296-foot pier. Residents and visitors from both within and outside of Pinellas County engage in nearshore activities such as kayaking and fishing. Live Oak Park evokes "Old Florida" with its Live Oak trees and natural features, along with picnic tables. Few places in Pinellas County offer this type of access to the public. The Pinellas Trail also traverses the Community.

The natural environment found in Crystal Beach is an integral component of the Community's character and scenic quality of life, while also providing significant environmental benefits, including:

- Shoreline access for wildlife, such as shorebirds, horseshoe crabs, and gopher tortoises.
- Shallow water habitats and a diversity of plant species for aquatic and terrestrial animals.
- Erosion protection.
- Mangrove protection.
- Protection of the upland coastal environment.

Protecting this area is not only consistent with existing Pinellas County shore protection programs, it also helps maintain Powers and Hanby's original vision of Crystal Beach being "a better place to live".

It is the Community's intent to work with the County by adding additional native vegetation within public areas. The Community intends to encourage water conservation and minimize the use of pesticides and fertilizer through additional plantings of native and drought-tolerant trees and plants where feasible on public property and to encourage homeowners to do the same on their own property.

Purpose of the Community Vision Statement

The Community seeks adoption of a Community Overlay to define and recognize Crystal Beach as a distinct Pinellas County community. As the historic resource surveys conducted for Pinellas County pointed out, it is important to "protect and preserve treasures of the past." The 1991 survey noted that Crystal Beach "has a number of architecturally significant houses." Not only does Crystal Beach have an "Old Florida" feel with its Live Oak Park, abundant natural features, and low-density housing, it also possesses a strong sense of community. Neighbors can get to know each other. Children have a safe place to play. A Community Overlay will allow for decision-making and planning that promote the Community's vision.

Community Vision Statement

Crystal Beach is a distinct Pinellas County Community. The following characteristics help define its history, character and natural environment, demonstrating that the Community is unique and worthy of special recognition and consideration by the Board of County Commissioners:

- Crystal Beach is a small, residential, unincorporated area in northern Pinellas County bordered to the west by St. Joseph's Sound, to the east by U.S. Alternate 19 North, the Pinellas Trail, Avery Bayou and Sutherland Bay, to the north by Oceanview Avenue and to the south by Sutherland Bayou and St. Joseph's Sound.
- Crystal Beach is one of the original communities in Pinellas County with homesteading beginning in the 1850's. In 1912, A.D. Powers and J.D. Hanby platted a traditional grid street layout, which included a main boulevard and alleyways that promote connectivity, along with abundant natural features such as Live Oak Park and a public waterfront path along St. Joseph's Sound. This original layout contributes to Crystal Beach being a pedestrian, bicycle and golf cart-friendly Community with an "Old Florida" feel that lives on to this day.
- Foundational to the character of Crystal Beach is the long-established, paved and shell pathway and public area along St. Joseph's Sound, bordered by mangroves. This path (referred to as Gulf Shore Park by Powers and Hanby) allows the public—both residents of and visitors to Crystal Beach—to enjoy peaceful walks along the water.
- The area's many environmental features include coastal waters, indigenous marine life, Chautaugua Lake fed by natural springs, and a largely unsullied natural shoreline along St. Joseph's Sound and into Sutherland and Avery Bayou. It contains wetlands and uplands and their associated vegetation and wildlife, as well as a large population of native birds and waterfowl. Mangroves border the unpaved portion of the public path that runs along the Sound.
- There is a strong sense of community in Crystal Beach. Powers and Hanby's original vision of a quiet place where people could relax, fish, walk, and "enjoy life and talk to neighbors" is a reality today.

Comprehensive Plan Objective and Policies

OBJECTIVE: The Board of County Commissioners will utilize a Community Overlay to define and recognize Crystal Beach as a cohesive community and as a means to identify and support the local vision, community character, and natural environment.

POLICY: Land use, zoning, and conditional use decisions that affect properties in Crystal Beach should be compatible with the Community's primarily low density residential development pattern.

POLICY: Pinellas County will consider the historical and functional integrity of the Revised Plat of Crystal Beach (which resulted in largely low-density residential development in a traditional grid pattern layout with a main boulevard and alleyways that promote connectivity) when making land use, zoning, conditional use and site plan decisions. The boundaries of the Revised Plat of Crystal Beach are defined as Georgia Avenue to the south, Alternate U.S. Highway 19 to the east, lots on the north side of Avery and Ohio Avenues to the north, and Gulf Drive to the west.

POLICY: Decisions by Pinellas County and other agencies that affect the use and development of land will place a priority on the protection of the recreational spaces and assets, natural and historic resources, and the natural environment, including mangrove and other estuary habitats and the dependent species associated with them.

POLICY: A coastal shoreline path, comprised of the paved and unpaved public right-of-way along St. Joseph's Sound from Ohio Avenue to Georgia Avenue, has existed as a public amenity since Crystal Beach was originally platted and represents an integral and defining public feature of the Community, providing public access to the scenic waterfront. County staff will work with the County's Historic Preservation Board and the Crystal Beach Community to explore preservation of the path as a landmark site as allowed under the County's historic preservation ordinance in recognition of its significance to the Community and the County.

POLICY: Live Oak Park was set aside in the early 1960s to serve as an important gathering place for the Community and will be protected for its historic, environmental and community value. Pinellas County and other agencies will consider these factors when making any decisions affecting Live Oak Park.

POLICY: The County is supportive of the Community's desire to preserve its coastal character through the use of native landscaping and will partner with the Community where practical and feasible on identifying ideas and locations for beautification of public right-of-way, particularly along Crystal Beach Avenue.

POLICY: Commercial land uses within Crystal Beach along Alternate U.S. Highway 19 are appropriate and compatible with the residential areas of Crystal Beach. Commercial businesses along this state highway are an asset to Crystal Beach residents, and it is the intent to retain this pattern of residential and commercial development in the Community.