

PLANNING TO STAY ELEMENT

of the

PINELLAS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



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as staff to the

LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY

for

**THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA**

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Table of Contents

PREFACE.....	i
LOCATION MAP	ii
<u>GOVERNING PRINCIPLES*</u>	Principles-1
INTRODUCTION	Intro-1
<u>1- PINELLAS COUNTY TODAY – CITIES, SMALL TOWNS, SUBURBS</u>	
Overview	1-1
<u>2- PINELLAS COUNTY – A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE</u>	
Service Area Concept	2-1
<u>3- IS PINELLAS UNIQUE AMONG URBAN COUNTIES</u>	
Overview	3-1
<u>4- CHALLENGES OF BUILDOUT IN PINELLAS COUNTY</u>	
Providing a Quality Environment	4-1
Land Use Patterns	4-1
Strong and Vital Neighborhoods.....	4-3
Renaissance of Urban and Town Centers	4-5
Matching Development with Natural Resource and Infrastructure Constraints	4-7
Protecting and Restoring Pinellas County’s Natural Heritage	4-9
Housing.....	4-10
Mobility.....	4-13
Remaining Competitive in the Regional and Global Economy	4-16
<u>5- WORKING PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE DECISIONS ON BUILDOUT</u>	
General	5-1
Urban Communities.....	5-1
Housing.....	5-3
Natural Heritage	5-4
Mobility	5-4
Economy	
<u>Appendix A – Short History of Urban Development in Pinellas County</u>	A-1

List of Tables

1	Existing Land Use in Pinellas County, Florida – 1989 and 2000	1-4
2	Real Property Taxable Value by Land Use Categories, Pinellas County, Florida.....	1-7
3	Personal Income in Pinellas County, Florida – Derived from Earnings by Place of Work.....	1-8
4	Number of Dwelling Units by Type in Pinellas County, Florida in February 2000.....	1-10
5	Per Capital Personal Income (PCP) in 1999.....	2-2
6	Urbanized Area Population Density per Square Mile.....	3-2
7	Comparison of Educational Attainment for Different Areas of the United States In 1990 and 2000.....	4-17

List of Figures

<u>1</u>	<u>Communities and Rail Lines in Pinellas County, Florida - 1913</u>	1-2
<u>2</u>	<u>Municipalities and Unincorporated Areas in Pinellas County, April 2008</u>	1-3
<u>3</u>	<u>Vacant Parcels of Lane – Fives Acres or Larger in Pinellas County, April 2008</u>	1-5
<u>4</u>	<u>Recreation and Open Space in Pinellas County, 2008</u>	1-11
<u>5</u>	<u>Scenic/Non-Commercial Corridors and Beautification Corridors in</u> <u>Pinellas County, Florida</u>	1-14
<u>6</u>	<u>Population Growth in Pinellas County and the Tampa-St. Petersburg-</u> <u>Clearwater-Metro Area</u>	2-4
<u>7</u>	<u>Employment in Pinellas County and the Tampa-St. Petersburg-</u> <u>Clearwater-Metro Area</u>	2-5
<u>8</u>	<u>Regionally Significant Transportation Facilities in the Tampa Bay Region</u>	2-6
<u>9</u>	<u>Downtown Redevelopment and Florida Main Street Programs in Pinellas County</u>	4-6
<u>10</u>	<u>Public Community Colleges and Institutions Offering Bachelor’s Degrees or Higher</u> ...	4-18

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.