

Intergovernmental Coordination



ISSUE: INTERGOVERNMENTAL COORDINATION

Pinellas County contains 25 local governments – 24 municipalities and the County. The EAR process will consider whether there need to be new or modified arrangements (informal or formal) by which various local governments and agencies can more effectively work together in addressing issues or subjects of common interest.

DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUE

This is not an issue that can be fully addressed in this EAR, and surely intergovernmental coordination in this County cannot be characterized as absolute or definable. Indeed, the acts of cooperation, collaboration and coordination that occur everyday among the 25 governments in this small peninsular county are more a dynamic form of art than routine.

The methods and degree of coordination required to make this County the world class tourist destination it is, the western anchor of the State's technology and research economy, a leader in environmental stewardship, and a sought-after residential location, defies easy description.

And while there are, every day, a number of cooperative arrangements, hand shakes and agreements that take place to make for efficient and improved operations, there are also daily issues, squabbles and lines drawn in the sand from which it seems neither side will budge.

But today, with little vacant land for growth and expansion, with annexation defining and testing new boundaries, with traditional arrangements for service delivery being tested, with housing affordability and competition for land changing the fabric of our communities, now more than ever the future of the County requires recognizing our common ground.

Over two years ago, beginning with the Pinellas Assembly, the methods, successes and failures of intergovernmental coordination began to be scrutinized, particularly in regard to fire safety, transportation and recreation. This analysis revealed that while overall, County residents enjoy a high level of urban service delivery, it is perhaps not always provided in the most cost efficient, effective and equitable manner. Attempting to change current processes and funding relationships, however, evidences that turf and territory often outweigh the common good. The heated debate on annexation reveals this complexity most visibly.

In a County of 25 governments, then, how do we achieve common ground? And how do we plan, where necessary, for the County as a whole without

jeopardizing individual County and municipal visions and goals? How do we protect those communities who wish to remain unincorporated from the nibbling away of their community and neighborhood boundaries through annexation? And finally, how do we ensure that Pinellas County is positioned to retain its economic standing in the regional and global market, which requires a coming-together of our diverse governments, taking advantage of our individual strengths and assets, and leaving our parochial interests behind us.

Today, this is paramount in the County's thinking. For this reason, the Pinellas Assembly became the first foray into analysis of our long-standing relationships, and the current County Charter review and Strategic Planning processes further evidence the County's commitment to exploring new relationships, responsibilities and ways of doing business. Other County planning initiatives evidence a willingness to explore current relationships and determine how to work together to achieve common goals.

For example, the recently completed *Gateway to the Future* Report assesses how actions by Pinellas County government can contribute to the success of the Gateway Area as an employment and economic centerpiece, and highlights the need for the County and the cities of Largo, Pinellas Park and St. Petersburg to work together to make this happen. The County's *Master Plan for Recreation, Open Space and Cultural Systems* included input and involvement throughout the process from the municipalities and the recreational and cultural service providers. The result is a plan that encourages the County to take on new roles and responsibilities. At the same time, the County is exploring the need to position all facets of the transportation system in the County to support the future, recognizing that mobility is not only key to individual quality of life, but also to the local and regional economy. The ability and success of future development and redevelopment is closely tied to seamless provision of transportation options and effective alternatives. In particular, there are new requirements at the State level regarding transportation concurrency that will require collaborative approaches to managing the impacts of development on roadways throughout the County. Also, following the hurricane seasons of 2004 and 2005, a re-examination of pre- and post-disaster planning strategies is called for. There are undoubtedly opportunities for better local coordination, including in our local mitigation strategy planning and level of commitment. In addition, with some redevelopment plans considering areas of higher density, it is imperative that land use planning goals and disaster planning goals be better coordinated among all 25 governments. If anything, the 2005 hurricane season has shown us the results of a history of land use planning decisions that did not adequately consider the limits and vulnerability of the land, or the contribution of the natural environment to protecting coastal populations. Planning for Pinellas County's future, and positioning the County for redevelopment requires a hard look by all 25 governments at the relationship of our plans, including our land use and environmental planning decisions, to our pre- and post-disaster preparedness requirements. And from a regional and local planning perspective, coordination

in regard to ensuring a reliable, cost-effective and efficient potable water supply must be a priority.

Any discussion of intergovernmental coordination must eventually broach the subject of annexation. Since January 1, 2000, municipalities in Pinellas County have annexed almost 7,000 acres of the unincorporated area. **Figure 5** reveals that most of the annexations have occurred in the mid-county area involving the cities of Largo, Pinellas Park, Seminole, and St. Petersburg. Other municipalities, however, have also annexed property over the past five years; they include Clearwater, Dunedin, Tarpon Springs, Oldsmar, Safety Harbor, Kenneth City, Gulfport, and Redington Shores. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Pinellas County entered into an interlocal agreement with each of the larger municipalities to identify a municipal planning area that included unincorporated areas that the city could include within its comprehensive plan for planning purposes. Pinellas County, however, retained control over these unincorporated areas. In November 2000, the voters passed a referendum that gave the Board of County Commissioners control over voluntary annexation. The implementing County ordinance (Ordinance No. 00-63) established annexation planning areas around those municipalities that had room to annex. These annexation planning area boundaries were drawn up by the Pinellas Planning Council, and largely followed the municipal planning area boundaries established in the earlier interlocal agreements.

The amendment to the Pinellas County Charter has not resolved all concerns and issues associated with the process and results of annexation. In fact, the continuing issues resulted in annexation being one of the subjects assigned to a Pinellas Assembly task force to develop recommendations on how the cities and the County might resolve remaining issues. The Pinellas County Charter Review Committee is also studying annexation issues to determine whether to present the voters with additional proposals to amend the County Charter. While these and other efforts are underway locally to try to resolve concerns with annexation (it is generally recognized that a statewide resolution through the Legislature is highly unlikely), one specific issue that was raised when County staff discussed this subject with their counterparts at the municipal level is the continuing confusion over when responsibility for operating and maintaining roads and drainage systems transitions from the County to the city after annexation. Uncertainty about which local government is responsible creates problems not only in establishing capital and operational budgets, but also in responding to citizen questions and complaints about roads and drainage facilities. This would appear to be one aspect of the annexation discussion where agreement could be reached and resolution achieved relatively quickly.

Pinellas County as a whole is at a critical juncture. We are at a point where we can decline or we can succeed. A successful future requires that we all set aside the baggage and realize that the future of this County fundamentally depends on how we learn to work together. Importantly, we need to recognize, capitalize on,

and enhance the collaborative relationships that work well, and cultivate functional partnerships and relationships where they do not exist now.

Intergovernmental coordination is at the core of almost every aspect of the County's Comprehensive Plan. As we plan for a successful future, and as we hope that Pinellas County, as a whole, remains a place where people will *plan to stay*, intergovernmental coordination and collaboration are perhaps the most vital components of our comprehensive planning process. For this reason, the various planning initiatives underway at this time that are exploring roles and responsibilities need to be completed and the hope is that each new finding and successful relationship will ultimately be institutionalized in individual comprehensive plans and, thereby, become a way of life - and the way to the future.