

***Remaining Competitive
In the
Regional and Global
Economies***



ISSUE: REMAINING COMPETITIVE IN THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ECONOMIES

The Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan does not currently include an economic component, yet the ability to achieve the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan is in large part dependent upon the strength, diversity, and resilience of the regional and local economies. Pinellas County will integrate the County economic development initiatives with the comprehensive planning program.

DISCUSSION OF THE ISSUE

As stated above, the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan provides only limited policy guidance on economic development. While not required by State law, an economic development element is recognized in the State Growth Management Act as an appropriate optional element that a local government should consider for inclusion in its comprehensive plan. Until recently, the County's economic development program centered on efforts to recruit firms from other regions and states to relocate to Pinellas County. In the late 1990s, the Board of County Commissioners expanded the scope of the County's economic development program to include, in addition to recruitment, support for and retention of businesses already located in the County, as well as an array of incentives and assistance programs to buttress and enhance the local economy. An Economic Development Department was created to implement this expanded program and to coordinate the County's program with those of the various municipalities, local chambers of commerce, adjacent counties, and state and regional economic development programs. In addition, the Pinellas County Convention and Visitors' Bureau concentrates on promoting tourism and special events that bring millions of guests and visitors to the County each year, who in return are significant contributors to the local economy and the quality and character of local communities.

Over time, the interdependence between the local economy and the various elements of the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan (e.g. Future Land Use, Transportation, Housing, Intergovernmental Coordination, and Capital Improvements) has become more apparent, and it is more clearly recognized that achieving goals and objectives in these existing elements of the Plan is in large measure dependent upon the vitality of the local economy. The reverse relationship is similarly true: the economy in Pinellas County is dependent to a large extent on the successful implementation of those objectives and policies in the various Plan elements that help create livable communities and that provide support for local businesses and their workers.

Development and adoption of an Economic Element to the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan will, at a minimum, consider the following topics in developing County economic policy and changes to the Land Development Code:

- Identify opportunities for Pinellas County to support efforts that increase the supply of skilled workers in the County and region. A highly trained and educated workforce is a key resource for attracting and retaining businesses that provide higher paying and challenging jobs. The quality and availability of the County's public schools and post-secondary educational institutions are critical to achieving the County's economic development goals. Use the symbiotic relationship between Pinellas County government and St. Petersburg College as a model for County support for quality education and training.
- Coordinate public investment in capital improvements with economic development goals, including those goals that support the tourism industry.
- Clarify and strengthen the interrelationship between economic growth and the provision of adequate and community housing for all segments of the population and workforce.
- Provide policy direction for implementation of the County's Brownfields Program within the unincorporated area and its application within the municipalities.
- Identify and establish an incentive program for achieving economic development objectives.
- Provide policy guidance on land assembly to assist targeted businesses relocate to or remain in Pinellas County, and how to determine what county-owned parcels of land might be considered suitable for economic development purposes.
- Include efforts to recruit and retain targeted industries and businesses.
- Identify actions that can be taken to support retention and development of tourist accommodations.
- Identify how to take advantage of redevelopment and infill development opportunities to enhance Pinellas County's image as a tourist destination by improving or replacing outdated and blighted retail strip centers and commercial areas. (This will also probably be covered in the Future Land Use Element.)
- Determine what changes to land use regulations and other codes are needed to support economic development goals. The interdependence between the new Economic Element and the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan must be kept in mind when identifying appropriate regulatory changes.
- Establish criteria for ensuring an adequate land use base for manufacturing and other employment-based industries and businesses. (This will probably be located in the Future Land Use Element of the Plan.)