

Strategic Focus Area:

**Environment,
Open Spaces,
Recreation & Culture**



Strategic Plan:

Pinellas County Government

Strategic Focus Area:

Environment, Open Spaces, Recreation &
Culture

Preliminary approval given by the BCC on October 25, 2005

Final adoption by BCC on February 14, 2006

Distinguishing characteristics of this focus area:

This focus area includes those functions, activities and physical infrastructure of County Government that support environmental, recreation & cultural resources in Pinellas County. Pinellas County has invested substantial resources to acquire and protect environmentally important lands, as preserves and community parks. The Penny for Pinellas was a primary funding tool to acquire many of these sites, as well as develop extensive passive recreational and educational facilities.

A highlighted feature of the Penny for Pinellas has been the creation of substantial trails networks, including the Pinellas Trail. The land and recreational infrastructure developed over the past two decades has clearly become a hallmark of the community. The environmental sustainability culture embraced in Planning to Stay bases a substantial portion of its foundation on the preservation of quality open spaces and recreational options for residents and visitors. The County has identified that its ecological resources, including outstanding waterways and beaches, should remain a focal point for community identity.

In preparation of the next twenty years of environmental stewardship and community recreational asset management, Pinellas retained a team of consultants to study community needs and assets. The team, lead by the firm of Glatting Jackson, recently presented its final plan, entitled the Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan. The Plan calls for seven major initiatives to “make Pinellas County a more livable and sustainable place to live, work and raise a family...” The County Commissioners have reviewed its findings, and accepted the plan and its conclusions.

Concurrent with Glatting Jackson’s efforts, the Pinellas Arts Council championed a companion document focusing on the cultural resources and goals of the community. Its key conclusions were also reviewed and embraced by the County Commissioners. Among its key goals is to increase the financial investments into existing cultural programs.

This strategic element focuses on those actions and roles that pertain to supporting these two major planning initiatives, in an effort to ensure that implementation is timely and successful. The implementation phase will involve cooperation, and at times partnerships, with other local governments, non-profit entities and private sector businesses.

Implementation also contemplates the renewal of the Penny for Pinellas for an additional decade, as identifies this revenue as the major funding source for much of the recreational components of the Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan. With a successful renewal of the Penny for Pinellas, the County will transition from a role of providing mainly passive and preserve facilities, into the development of limited active recreational facilities for all County residents. The Plans \$339 Million 15-year capital improvement plan can be funded at fundamentally the same level as historically invested from Penny allocations into environmental and recreation facilities.

Environmental scan

- Public concerns and priorities:
 - High levels of approval ratings for trail and parks/preserve facilities in citizen and business surveys.
 - High indicators of support for continuation of Penny for Pinellas for recreational purposes, and environmental programs.
 - General municipal support for MSTU approach for recreational subsidies for unincorporated residents and grant program.
 - High levels of support for Pinellas trail.
 - Concern over loss of water access points – beach and boat ramp/marinas.
 - Slow increases in user visits to preserve facilities.

- Building and Social developments:
 - Trails, parks and playgrounds among top 5 most important amenities for new homebuyers. (2002 survey by National Assoc. of Homebuilders and National Assoc. of Realtors)
 - Communities proximity to parks and greenways correlated directly to increased property values, tax revenues, attraction to business.
 - Trend toward “Mega-Recreation Centers” with one stop shopping with indoor and outdoor facilities, aquatics, and senior components.
 - In 2004, 75% of conservation or parks referendums nationally approved by voters. Livable communities as local Pinellas emphasis.

- Environmental and Planning trends:
 - Bird populations (Osprey) are up, as are fish populations, due to improving water quality.
 - Land use policies shifting toward linkages between neighborhoods, with trails and pedestrian walkways.
 - Continued emphasis of roadway trails as an extension of greenways system, with streetscape enhancements, bicycle trail enhancements and similar improvements.
 - Nexus between recreational goals and planning incentives through Livable Communities effort.

Part One:

The Vision – The economy we need for a quality community.

1. Community Expectations: What the Community desires in environment, open space, recreation and culture system policy and programs. (See Figure 1.)

Community expectations express what the general citizen desires with respect to the environmental resources, recreational amenities, and cultural resources in the County. Citizen expectations have been perhaps more closely studied in this strategic focus area than any of the other topics. The Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan scope included an extensive community engagement piece done in the form of a survey. The effort reached over 1200 citizens, who returned a detailed mail survey. The outreach yielded information on the met and unmet needs of the community in terms of recreational and cultural facilities. Its wide range included municipal as well as county assets, yielding detailed information that helped create the foundation of the Plan's major initiatives and specific plans.

In this survey, as in previous citizen opinion efforts, the majority of citizens cite a strong support for the County's past environmental lands acquisitions, and trails improvement efforts. However, a key new finding is the need for additional "active" recreational facilities. Active recreational needs of County residents have been primarily served by municipalities, and private for and not-for-profit facilities. The reimbursement of MSTU funds to cities has been one significant financial contribution

method by the County. However, the needs assessment suggests that two major sports complexes should be constructed in the northern and southern reaches of the County. The County is identified as the coordinating agency best suited to lead the development of these centers.

Unlike other areas where citizen desires and wants are often not supported by an equivalent enthusiasm for tax support by voters, 63% of this survey respondents expressed direct support for renewal of the Penny for Pinellas as a principle funding source for their recreational, environmental and cultural desires.

Other needs and priorities cited by community residents include:

- Additional art and cultural facilities and programs.
- Aquatic centers and water parks.
- Additional beach access, and on/off beach parking areas.
- An additional deep water boat ramp in north county, and facility improvements at other boating ramps.
- Improved canoe/kayak launches and rentals.
- Enhanced and extended hiking/walking/bicycling paths.
- Protection of natural resources and preserves.

In the area of business and economic development, business owners have consistently linked the County's quality of life as a business attribute. In the most recent bi-annual survey (2004), 86% of the respondents agreed that improving recreation assets increases new business attractiveness to the County, 95% rate recreational areas, parks and beaches as excellent or good, and 80% rates arts and entertainment as excellent or good. Thus, recreational facilities and natural resources, such as the water and beaches, also fill a role in economic development. Based on the extensive public sentiments collected, certain key public perceptions can be culled. These include:

- **Strong value placed on natural resources and the environment.** The community's hallmark theme, "Planning to Stay," envisions a Pinellas County where generations can remain in a community with the values and attributes that reflect high qualities of life. Protection of existing

natural areas, and passive access for residents to open natural areas through non-motorized methods, is one expression of retention of a quality community. The citizens at large appear to agree that the County government should avoid inappropriate encroachments into these areas.

- **Access to active recreational facilities.** Both older and younger residents of Pinellas are involved in many recreational sports and activities. As a consequence, residents have expressed clearly that additional facilities, small and large, should be provided by the County to help meet a growing demand of users.
- **Value arts and culture.** This reflects the value residents place on strong cultural activities in the County. A near unanimous majority polled link arts, cultural and heritage programs with improved quality of life. Similar perspectives are found in the business community, where many cite cultural programs as one important measure new businesses apply in their decision-making process.
- **Wise investments.** This is the expectation that public funds will be legitimately and efficiently used and that investments will be maintained. The citizens seem to support and approve of the past investments made by the County for environmental and recreational facilities through sources such as the Penny for Pinellas.

2. Results: What Pinellas County Government will deliver to meet community expectations.

Results are impacts that a particular entity, such as Pinellas County Government, is striving to make. Within the context of general community expectations, results are the contributions a specific entity, such as Pinellas County Government, can make toward the community expectations. As shown in Figure 1, when results are achieved, community expectations are met in part or whole.

Within a strategic focus area, the results express the “bottom line” impacts sought by the policy board.

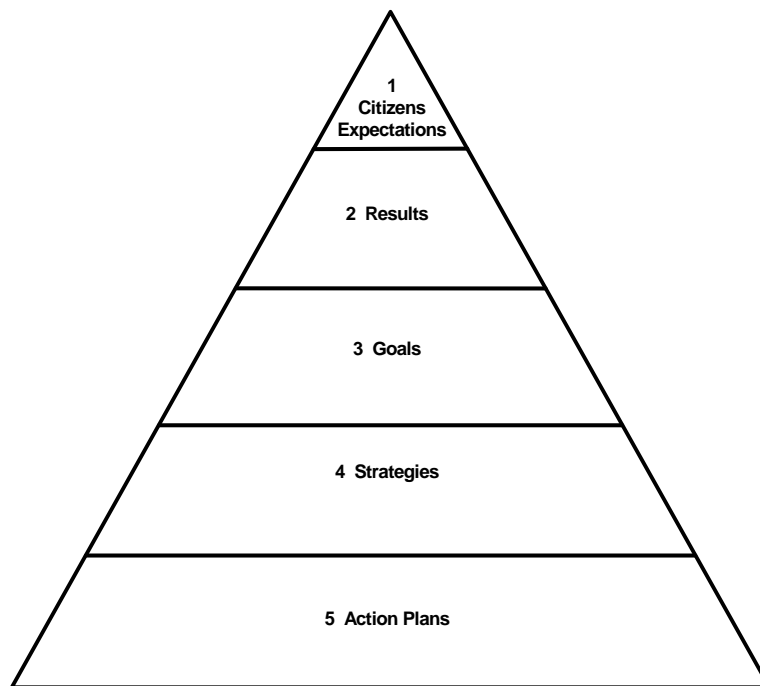
Within the Strategic Focus Area of Environment, Open Spaces, Recreation & Culture, Pinellas County Government seeks five results. These are:

1. **Protection of remaining environmentally significant resources.** Substantially all remaining natural areas of environmental significance should be preserved and protected. This result includes those lands already owned by public entities such as the County, as well as the acquisition of remaining pockets of properties that possess environmental values.
2. **A strong network of trails is available for walking, biking and hiking.** Pinellas County has a premier trail system, featuring the Pinellas Trail that extends from north to south throughout the County. This trail, in combination with connector trails, will be available for citizens who wish to travel the County for work or leisure. Trails and pedestrian walkways will also be available at the neighborhood level so that outdoor experiences are accessible to as many citizens as possible.
3. **Pinellas County is a community of lively cultural events and opportunities.** Art, music and cultural assets of wide variety add to the rich experiences available in Pinellas County. Cultural experiences can affect a wide range of age and economic strata, beginning in primary school and extending through a lifetime. Arts, cultural and heritage programs are one of the assets that make the quality of life in Pinellas County so rich.
4. **Systems of regional, community and neighborhood parks and recreational centers offer a full scope of recreational options for citizens.** Parks provide both passive and active recreational options, depending upon their capacity, location and purpose. Each

facility fills a need that may be unique to its site. Some preserves contain important environmental resources, and offer only passive human use managed in a way to protect natural areas, allowing limited human exposure with minimal impacts. Other parks are designed and improved with a multitude of activity areas, ranging from ball fields, aquatic centers, golf courses, ball courts and other sport facilities.

5. **Preserved and protected investments.** The County's Environment, Open Spaces, Recreation and Cultural facilities and sites are well managed and maintained.

Figure 1: Developing the Strategic Plan



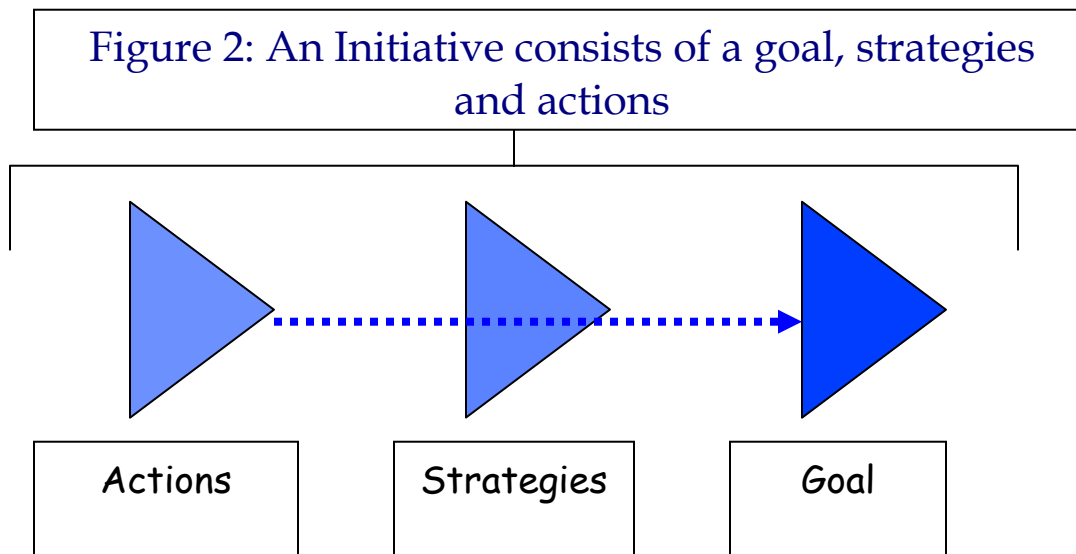
Part Two:

Developing the envisioned services through seven initiatives.

Goals, Strategies and Actions to create Results

What is an Initiative?

An initiative is a program of work intended to lead to one or more of the results. It is comprised of a goal; a set of strategies or pathways, which should lead to the goal, and a set of specific actions that will take place that will lead to the goal. To achieve these results, PINELLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT will engage in seven initiatives. As stated, each initiative is built around a goal (and named after the goal) and uses appropriate strategies and actions (tactics) that will achieve that goal as shown in Figure 2.



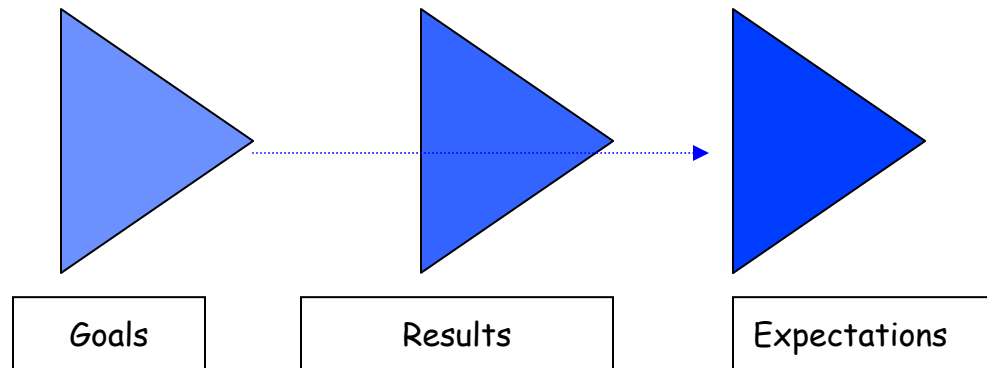
3. Goals

Achieving the following goals will create in Pinellas County the desired Environment, Open Spaces, Recreation & Culture outcomes described in Part 1, Figure 1 of this plan. Achieving these goals will produce the results the County is seeking and thereby meet community expectations as shown in Figure 3. In the Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan these goals were referred to as “the Big Ideas” and listed as Major Initiatives.

- **Promote a Sustainability Ethic in Pinellas County.** The foundation of this goal is to ensure that ecological limits and environmental impacts are considered during all aspects of community design, from energy efficiency in buildings to transportation system solutions. Sustainability principles, practices and indicators will be brought into policy debate and decision-making on a broad basis.
- **Strengthen Connections to Water.** Outstanding water bodies uniquely surround Pinellas County. For many residents, the water was a main reason for coming and staying in Pinellas. The County will promote and expand recreational access to the surrounding waters, and utilize this natural asset as a keystone community attribute.
- **Lead the development of outstanding countywide systems.** The County’s preserves, historical and cultural sites, regional passive parks, greenways and blueways, and bicycle/pedestrian trails form a system of recreational and environmental systems that span nearly every corner of Pinellas County. This goal seeks to ensure that the system is updated and improved as the County transforms into its final built-out state. Trail, roadway and sign design standards are among the first components of upgraded features sought in this goal.

- **Provide urban levels of active recreation facilities in unincorporated areas.** In an effort to meet the needs and expectation of residents in unincorporated areas, the County will expand its efforts to develop community centers, community parks and sports complexes to serve the entire County. Concurrently, the County will seek partnerships with municipalities, the School Board and non-profit agencies for ongoing operations and maintenance.
- **Inject life, color and energy into regional parks and preserves.** The County's regional parks and preserves is a classic system of passive parks. Without compromising the environmental integrity of these facilities, the County will explore ways to build a broader base of compatible activities that will draw in users and be relevant to today's "lifestyles." Examples might include outdoor classrooms, educational exhibits and kiosks, canoe and kayak rentals, public art, gardens and other amenities.
- **Increase protection of regional parks and preserves.** The long-term protection of the County's preserves and passive parks is fundamental. The County will ensure that the natural resources of our preserves are guided by pro-active plans that set clear policies for management of these assets. In addition, plans will exam surrounding management zones to minimize off-site influences.
- **Promote the Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation.** Promote Arts and Culture and Historic Resources through investments and raised awareness for the existing non-profit facilities and programs. Art through design, both in public and private building and infrastructure, can add to the vitality of the County and community.

Figure 3: Accomplishing goals leads to results which meet expectations



What is strategy?

Strategy is figuring out how to optimize your assets and minimize your weaknesses in order to reach your goal. Like in other focus areas, PINELLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT has four fundamental types of assets it can use to achieve its Environment, Open Spaces, Recreation & Culture goals. Based on these four types of assets there are four corresponding categories of strategy:

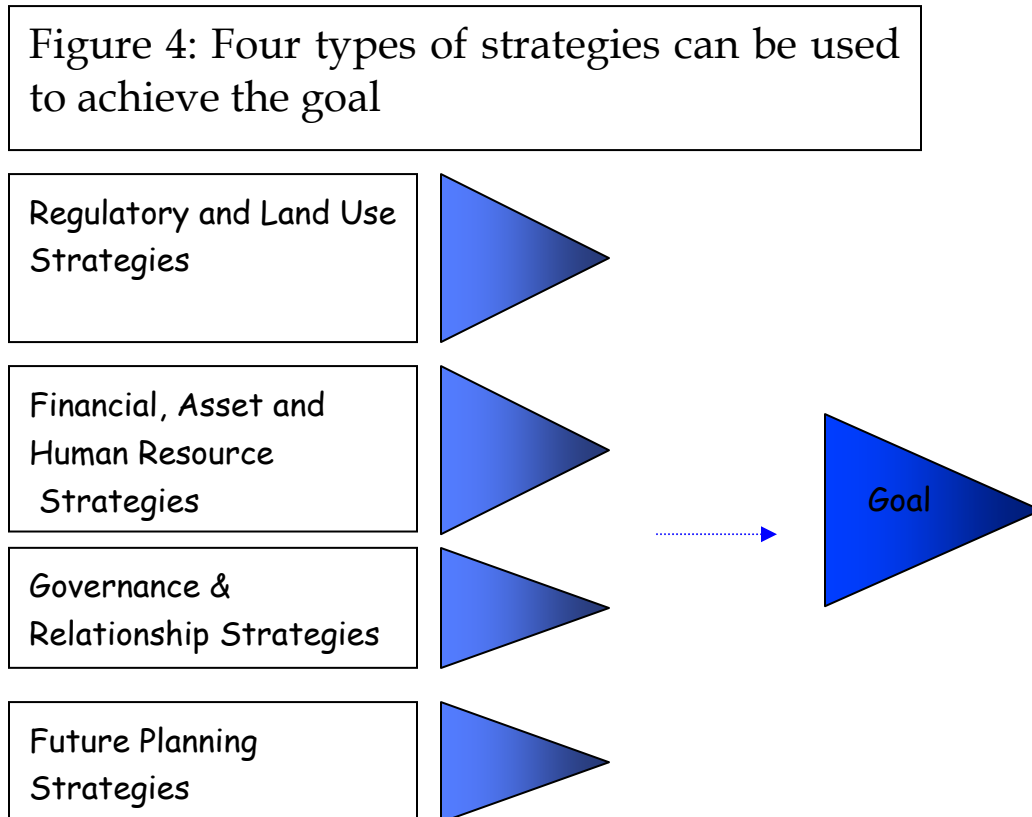
- **Regulatory and Land Use based strategy**

encompasses the planning and policy based plans and regulations that direct public and private investments in environmental, open space, recreation and culture developments. These plans and regulations provide the foundation that sets the parameters for those physical assets that need to be constructed, and directs resources through either mandated or incentive based policies.

Financial, Asset and Human Resources strategy encompasses the financial, physical and human assets which fund environmental, open space, recreation and culture development, and conduct operations. These assets include physical infrastructure (preserves, parks and similar properties), capital assets (improvements and equipment) and the services that make those physical assets usable.

- **Governance and Relationships strategy** covers the working and funding relationships among various stakeholders that make the system function, and leverage resources to the benefit of residents and visitors.
- **Planning and Future Thinking strategy** covers the knowledge about the system, future needs and how those needs can be met.

These four types of strategies are combined in an initiative to achieve the goal as shown in Figure 4.



4. Strategies & 5. Actions

Within each strategy type, there are specific pathways or strategies that PINELLAS COUNTY GOVERNMENT seeks to deploy or influence in order to achieve its Environment, Open Spaces, Recreation and Culture goals. Along each pathway there are specific actions that would occur. The strategies and some actions the county can use include:

Regulatory and land use strategies.

- Codify the key policies and visions of the Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan in the County's Comprehensive Plan (Recreation and Open Space Element).
 - Action: Staff will review appropriate plan changes, including County's Level of Service (LOS) standards, and prepare revisions as appropriate to achieve consistency.
- Consider revisions to the County's Land Development Regulations to require the construction of neighborhood parks in new developments.
 - Action: Staff to review appropriate plan and code changes, and present options to appointed and elected boards.
- Revise the County's Roadway Design Standards to require street trees, bike lanes, wide, multi-use bicycle/pedestrian paths and safety/ADA features on all new/improved roadways as appropriate.
 - Action: Planning, Parks and Public Works staff will coordinate efforts to ensure that recommendations are incorporated into plans and projects.
- Review options for policies regarding open space and golf course land conversions.
 - Action: Staff to review appropriate plans and code changes, and present a range of options to County Commissioners.

Resource optimization and funding strategies

- Accept and promote the priority capital programs identified in the Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan.
 - Action: Promote public understanding of the projects and priorities called for in the Plan.
 - Action: Promote the project support and understanding of key funding partners and stakeholders.
- BCC will finalize review of the Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan recommendations, including funding proposal for a capital program over a 15-year period through a renewed Penny for Pinellas.
 - Action: In-depth discussion and review by the BCC of the proposed \$339 million, fifteen year programmatic program with respect to both capital projects and O&M costs.
 - Identify partnerships and other financial sources for ongoing operations and maintenance costs, including specific partnerships in the venues of arts and active recreation.
 - Action: Study methods to leverage local dollars against other public and private funding sources.
- Consider Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan recommendations regarding increased investments in arts and cultural programs and organizations. Adopt action plan to increase per capita spending to be at par with top Florida communities.
 - Action: Identify multiple funding strategies – including public and business support.
 - Increase marketing of cultural activities and destinations to visitors and residents to increase usage and diversify tourism base.
 - Consider Tourism Development Tax resources that can be appropriately leveraged to assist in cultural marketing and other qualifying programs.
- Continue to utilize MSTU grants and partnerships with municipalities who provide recreational services to unincorporated residents.

- Forge new partnerships with municipalities and non-profits to manage and operate active recreational facilities constructed with principally County resources, to improve efficiencies and equitably share burdens.
- Pursue revenue neutral or revenue enhanced options for acquiring and expanding additional boating access facilities.
 - Action: Staff will proactively pursue opportunities to develop and expand boating ramps, without negatively impacting environmental resources. First priority facilities are noted in Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan (minimum of one deep water ramp in north, central and south areas of the County).
- Review options for Toytown and Struthers parcels for active recreational development and redevelopment, including a review of all recreational components.
 - Action: Staff will bring a range of alternatives for Toytown and Struthers sites to Board for policy discussion.
- Review options for AIRCO site.
- Continue to pursue naming rights, vendor opportunities and other revenue enhancement measures.

Governance and relationships strategies

- Institutionalize Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan recommendations regarding close coordination between County departments, local governments, and other agencies to maximize benefits and minimize conflicts of every public and private project and initiative.
 - Action: Staff will systemize inter- and intra-agency efforts, and strive for high levels of leveraged opportunities.
- Coordinate with the School Board to provide for after-hours use of school parks, playgrounds and gymnasiums.
 - Action: Staff to coordinate efforts with school district peers.
 - Action: Commit to ongoing dialogue with School Board to proactively identify challenges of joint use programs, and find solution-based alternatives.
- Consider Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan recommendations to forge new and expanded funding partnerships with

municipalities and non-profits to manage and operate recreational facilities on County sites.

- Build from MSTU foundation to strengthen relationships and form new operational agreements that ensures efficiencies and optimum service levels.
- Consumer engagement.
 - Broader citizen engagement to improve awareness of recreation needs and plans:
 - Develop educational material around flagship projects and facility proposals.
 - Develop strategies for dialogue in community settings to build support around Penny for Pinellas reauthorization.

Planning and future development strategies

- Link Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan into Livable Communities efforts, transportation CIP plans and transit concepts.
- Establish benchmarks and measurable indicators to monitor progress of the Pinellas County Recreation, Open Space and Culture System Master Plan.
 - Action: Staff will prepare and implement system monitoring and review conclusions with Board on periodic basis.