

1 *History of Development and Past Growth Patterns*

Early Settlement and Development of Pinellas County

The Pinellas peninsula historically attracted a diverse group of people including Tocobaga Indians, Spanish explorers, and eventually, in the mid 19th century, the first pioneers. The early settlers had to be hardy and persistent, as very little of the peninsula's interior was accessible or desirable for settlement. The population typically settled close to the coast as the only link to what little civilization existed elsewhere in Florida was via boat. Towns were isolated from one another, and even small distances seemed great during that early period of development. The first major city, St. Petersburg, developed around the railroad that arrived in 1888, providing the first easily traveled overland route to Pinellas.

Establishing the Patterns of Growth

Growth inevitably followed the railroad, and the towns that the train ran through. Tarpon Springs, Sutherland (now Palm Harbor), Ozona, Dunedin, Clearwater, Largo, and St. Petersburg immediately began to grow. As the terminus of the railroad and a deep-water port, St. Petersburg was poised to become the peninsula's major city.

Not until the early 1900s did the beaches become a real focal point for development as the United States' population acquired more leisure time, higher incomes, and greater mobility, and as roads, bridge access, and utilities were provided to the beach areas.

Early Impacts of Development

Growth did not come without its problems, and early settlements caused significant changes in the environment. Homesteaders harvested vast stands of virgin pine, cypress and hardwoods. Native vegetation was replaced by groves and farm fields. Huge rookeries of wading birds, such as snowy egrets and roseate spoonbills, were decimated by plume hunters, and organized hunts commonly targeted bear, panther and other major predators, which were considered a threat to livestock. The landscape of Pinellas County was changed forever.

Major Economic Influences Affecting Development

Pinellas County's economy has been influenced at different times and to different degrees by agriculture, tourism, retiree in-migration, and manufacturing. Agriculture was the major industry in Pinellas from the time of settlement until the early 20th century. Some of the highest, best-drained land was devoted to citrus production. When the benefits of modernization became available, the agricultural industry profited from new methods of processing and packing, and used the newly constructed railroad to export its products. Today, however, rapid population growth, urbanization, high land values, and freezes in the 1980s have caused the remaining citrus growers to abandon the citrus business in Pinellas and sell their groves for development.

A major contributor to the area's growth is the climate. At an 1885 American Medical Society Convention in New Orleans, the Pinellas peninsula was lauded as the healthiest spot on earth. This report fueled the growth of tourism, and many visitors were actually sent here by their doctors. Tourism expanded rapidly with the improvement of transportation into and throughout Pinellas. Growth and development have been, and remain, closely aligned with the tourist industry. In addition, the warm climate, coastal location, and abundance of recreational activities have historically attracted retirees to Pinellas County from all over the Country. This combination of tourist and retiree populations together has created an unusually large market for retail trade and service sector business.

It was during the late 1800s that the sponge industry and the Greek community in Tarpon Springs were established on the peninsula. Originally operating out of Key West, boats were now making regular trips to the area sponge beds, and soon the area's sponge industry was well established.

The three distinct elements of the Pinellas peninsula's early 20th-century economy -- the tourist industry, the citrus industry and the sponge industry -- had been clearly established by the end of the 19th century. These industries were arranged in a clear geographic pattern. The tourist industry was centered mainly around St. Petersburg in the south. The citrus industry covered the central region of the peninsula and shipped its products through the central railway depots at Largo, Clearwater, Dunedin and Sutherland. The sponge industry was centered in Tarpon Springs and Anclote at the northern end of the peninsula.

The manufacturing sector of the local economy did not develop to any great extent until the advent of the space program in the late 1950s, when new industry, primarily electronic and electronic component firms, began moving to Pinellas, helping to diversify the economy. Although the manufacturing sector grew steadily during the 1960s, the service and trade sectors, supported by increasing numbers of tourists and retirees, continued their domination of the County's economy.

The local economy maintained a similar pattern of development throughout the 1970s and into the 1990s. Many new companies, typically high technology manufacturing firms, have moved into Pinellas to take advantage of the favorable business climate. The financial sector, including the insurance and real estate industry, has grown to meet the demands resulting from this economic growth and development. Overall, the move away from an economic base dominated by the relatively low wages and the seasonal business cycle associated with the tourism/retirement industry has helped strengthen and stabilize the local economy.

Transition from Cities to Suburbs

Pinellas County, with 280 square miles, is the second smallest county in the State. Its small land area and large population have made Pinellas by far the most densely populated county in Florida. At present, Pinellas County has an estimated 3,371 persons per square mile.

Pinellas County's development pattern was established early, and is evident even today on modern day street maps. The earliest roads often followed irregular, somewhat meandering routes to connect the County's scattered settlements. Existing examples are Clearwater-Largo Road and Tampa Road. The sites of early towns are apparent in the compact grid pattern

formed by their streets, as can be seen in St. Petersburg's downtown and its older neighborhoods along Central Avenue, as well as in downtown Clearwater, downtown Dunedin, and the older section of Palm Harbor.

Gridded streets remained in favor well into the 20th century, but blocks and home lots became noticeably larger as the automobile eliminated people's need to live in compact neighborhoods near the central downtown. Such larger, longer blocks can be seen in Clearwater east of Missouri Avenue.

It was in the decades after World War II that residential development increasingly moved away from the grid pattern and toward large subdivisions with curving streets, cul-de-sacs, and few connections with the surrounding road network. This reduced traffic in residential areas, but it greatly restricted access and funneled huge volumes of cars onto major roads. Most residential developments built in Pinellas since 1970, mainly in the northern end of the County, have continued to follow this pattern.

In the immediate post-war era, Pinellas County also began to see a major change in commercial development with the advent of the shopping center and shopping mall. After the war, the automobile allowed more and more people to live in the suburbs, farther away from downtown areas which were the traditional shopping districts. Where traditional downtown districts consisted of many buildings on many lots, the new shopping districts were in shopping centers built by a single developer on a single parcel. These new shopping centers, with their expansive parking lots, were designed to accommodate cars, which were replacing buses and streetcars as the nation's predominant form of urban transportation.

One other innovation that had tremendous impact on the County's postwar development pattern was the mobile home. This low-cost dwelling was especially popular with retirees, and by the early 1960s, Pinellas contained more mobile homes than any other county in the state.

The Effects of the Real Estate and Building Booms

The continued growth of Pinellas County created demand for better roads, bridges and water service. For example, it was during the 1920s that the City of St. Petersburg's wells began to produce poor quality water. After studying the problem, the City decided to search for a better water source, which eventually resulted in the City's purchase, in 1940, of areas in northwest Hillsborough County for future wellfield development. Road building during this period increased at a steady pace. One of the more significant transportation improvements constructed during the 1920s was Clearwater's "million dollar" causeway. Stretching from downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Beach, the causeway replaced an old wooden bridge. The new causeway helped to further enhance the popularity of the beach by providing easy access from the mainland to the island.

When World War I ended in 1918, thousands of tourists came to Pinellas County for vacations, to buy new homes, and to invest their money. The Florida real estate boom began in 1921, and reached its height in 1925. As more people migrated to Florida in the early 1920s, the housing supply became inadequate, which, in turn, touched off a building boom. More people also meant more roads. The most important transportation improvement to be constructed

during this time was the Gandy Bridge linking St. Petersburg to Tampa, effectively shortening the traveling distance between the two cities from 43 to 19 miles.

World War II's end in 1945 marked the start of another era of rapid growth for Pinellas County. The removal of wartime restrictions on spending and mobility contributed to the area's boom. And once again, new residents flocked to the County. However, it was the 1950s that witnessed the most spectacular growth in the history of Pinellas, and the County's population increased by more than 135 percent between 1950 and 1960. This increase represented the largest numerical gain, as well as the highest percentage increase, ever recorded in Pinellas County's population.

During this phase of development, as the demand for waterfront property began to exceed the supply, developers started dredging sand to turn portions of shallow bays into dry land. By 1970, dredge-and-fill had added 4,800 acres to the County, mostly in Boca Ciega and Clearwater Bays. The resultant environmental impacts from dredging and filling prompted the creation of agencies to regulate the activity. In 1955, the Legislature created the Pinellas County Water and Navigation Control Authority. Continued problems from dredge-and-fill led Pinellas County to push the Legislature for two special acts to halt the sale of local submerged lands, thus ending this manufacture of land.

The tremendous growth in Pinellas during the 1950s also placed increasing demands on public services. In an attempt to provide land use controls, Pinellas County's Board of County Commissioners adopted zoning regulations and a building permit procedure in 1955.

During this same period, the County's water supply was threatened with saltwater intrusion. The Pinellas County Water System realized, as had the City of St. Petersburg in earlier years, that the peninsula's water sources would not be adequate to meet population demands. Therefore, the property in the corner of northeastern Pinellas County and northwestern Hillsborough County was leased for wellfield development, and the Eldridge-Wilde Wellfield was put into operation in 1956.

Inadequate sewer facilities presented another problem for Pinellas County's growing population. By the late 1950s, a sizable proportion of the County's total population was not connected to a central sanitary sewer system. In 1960, the South Cross Bayou Sanitary District was created, the first of many such districts created to expand sewer service across the County. Thanks to proactive long range planning on the part of the County and municipal governments, by the late 1980s most of Pinellas County was on regional sanitary sewer, or was being served by a smaller package plant.

Several major transportation projects were constructed during this boom period. Perhaps the most spectacular was the construction of the first span of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, which crossed Tampa Bay and connected the Pinellas peninsula with Manatee County. Additionally, a twin span to the Gandy Bridge was built, and the Howard Frankland Bridge was constructed across Tampa Bay midway between the Gandy Bridge and the Courtney Campbell Causeway. The Howard Frankland Bridge opened in 1960, and was later added to the federal interstate highway system. Also constructed during the period from 1960-1962 were the Pinellas Bayway, which provided another link between the southern Pinellas mainland and the Gulf Beaches, and the Clearwater Pass Bridge, connecting Clearwater Beach with Sand Key.

On July 19, 1955, the last segment of the Gulf Coast Highway (now known as U.S. Highway 19) was opened for traffic in St. Petersburg, providing a direct route between Pinellas and Tallahassee. The new road was hailed as another boon to tourism, and development began alongside it almost as soon as it was completed.

Land Use Planning as the Means to Manage Growth

In the early 1970s, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners recognized that the development pace was seriously threatening the County's ability to provide the quality of life expected and desired by both residents and visitors alike. They recognized that a more focused program of land use planning, environmental lands acquisition, and regulatory land use controls provided the means to ensure that the future pattern of land uses occurred in a more orderly fashion, and provided a better balance of community and environmental needs. This was perhaps one of the first attempts by a local government to comprehensively address long term sustainability issues through a regulatory land use map.

In 1975, the Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act was instituted by the Florida Legislature. This provided further impetus to a landmark project initiated in the late 1970s by the County to identify environmentally-significant lands throughout the County with the intent of adopting the necessary and appropriate regulatory land use designations to preserve their environmental significance. This planning effort resulted in significant wetlands, beach and dune systems, and 25 year floodways and floodplains being delineated as Preservation on the Future Land Use Map. Associated with this effort was the identification of appropriate development restrictions and prohibitions on, or adjacent to, environmentally-significant lands.

In 1989, with the adoption of substantial amendments that thoroughly revised and expanded the scope of the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan, the County began to seriously grapple with other land use and development-related issues like hurricane evacuation and emergency shelter deficiencies as they related to residential densities within the vulnerable coastal area. For example, the Board of County Commissioners exercised initiative in severely restricting residential densities within the unincorporated area, which would serve to exacerbate the existing evacuation and shelter problem. The relationship between development and the ability to provide needed public services and facilities was also addressed in 1989 with the adoption of the County's concurrency management procedures. The impact of these new requirements was perhaps most noticeable in new restrictions being placed on development intensities for projects located along roadway corridors with deficient operating conditions.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the excesses of the County's early history, today, Pinellas County has a mature growth management program. It is clear that Pinellas County's quality of life, enjoyed today by so many, is largely dependent upon the foundation provided by the long range land use planning and management strategies which have been in place for well over twenty five years, and upon proactive responses by the Board of County Commissioners to the challenges of a community now approaching build out. It is the Future Land Use & Quality Communities Element of the Comprehensive Plan that continues to serve as the basis for the County's long range growth management program today.