

2 Land Use Coordination and Highway Beautification

Introduction

Historical trends in land development in the United States clearly illustrate the inextricable link between transportation and land use. Following the enactment of the Federal Interstate Highway Act in 1956, new highways began to stretch out across the Country. Government housing policy made single-family home buying easier for returning GIs and the demand for automobiles fueled the desire of people to move away from urban centers. Stores and other businesses followed the exodus and development nodes began to cluster around interchanges, which resulted in the formation of suburban communities. The establishment of these communities was accompanied by a demand for more accessibility, which in turn, led to further roadway expansion.

An example of the influence of highway development on growth in Pinellas County was demonstrated following the opening of US Highway 19 to St. Petersburg in 1955, providing a major north-south thoroughfare in Pinellas County.¹ This directed growth away from the central cities of the County and resulted in the development of shopping malls and single-family subdivisions, developments designed for automobile travel. This spurred more growth into north Pinellas County and resulted in further road expansion designed to serve these areas. Much of this growth was evident in the 1970s with the development of major shopping malls such as Pinellas Square Mall, Clearwater Mall, Tyrone Square Mall and Countryside Mall and low-density residential areas in Northeast Clearwater (Countryside) and Palm Harbor. As the populations in these areas grew, transportation improvements were implemented on facilities designed to serve them, including County Road 611, US Highway 19 and State Road 580. The trend continued through the 1980s and is evident in Pinellas County today by the recent development and road improvements that have occurred in North Pinellas County in the East Lake Tarpon Area (East Lake Road) and the outlying areas of Palm Harbor (Belcher Road Extension).

The coordination of transportation and land use planning in Pinellas County occurs primarily through the following activities: 1) The review of proposed Future Land Use Map (FLUM) amendments and community redevelopment plans; 2) The application of scenic/noncommercial corridor policies; and 3) Transportation demand forecasting. These activities are carried out through the County's long-range planning functions and through its involvement in the MPO Long Range Plan Update process.

It should also be noted that the Future Land Use and Quality Communities Element contains policies that set the framework for the amendment of the Land Development Code to implement livable community strategies and improvements. The Planning to Stay Element of the Comprehensive Plan defines the concept of livable communities as "linking transportation and land use planning to create a better quality of life through the creation of distinctive urban environments that offer mobility and lifestyle choices and a place where people want to work and live." The MPO is scheduled to approve a model livable community land development code for implementation by the County's local governments in 2008. Following this action,

Pinellas County will develop amendatory language for its land development code to integrate the livable community concept into its site plan review process. This will include requirements and incentives for development projects to include livable community features and elements in their site design.

As with land use coordination efforts, highway beautification also serves to influence transportation, albeit in a more understated fashion. Public perception of the environment of a road corridor extends beyond the operating conditions of the road itself. Whether traveling by automobile, bus, bicycle or foot, people tend to seek visual order in their surroundings. Quality landscape designs help to provide this order by creating more positive visual experiences. These experiences reflect on the quality of life of a city or community.² In addition, landscape design can create a more pleasurable driving experience for motorists, thereby serving to calm vehicular traffic. Consequently, in addition to reducing the potential for accidents caused by aggressive driving, a safer and friendlier environment can be provided for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Land Use Coordination

Pinellas County's land use coordination efforts are carried out by the Planning Department which is the designated local planning agency (LPA) for the Board of County Commissioners (BCC). As such, the Planning Department is responsible for carrying out the LPA functions, as defined in Chapter 163, F.S., associated with the delivery of public services and facilities under the jurisdiction of the BCC serving as the local governing body. These functions include the following:

- Prepare the local comprehensive plan and plan amendments (including FLUM amendments) and make recommendations regarding such plans or amendments to the local governing body;
- Monitor and oversee the effectiveness and status of the comprehensive plan and recommend to the local governing body such changes as may be necessary from time to time; and
- Review proposed land development regulations, land development codes, and amendments thereto, and to make recommendations to the local governing body regarding the consistency of the proposal with the adopted comprehensive plan.

Future Land Use Map Amendments

In reviewing proposed amendments to the FLUM, the LPA evaluates whether they are consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the adopted Comprehensive Plan, and renders a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners based on their findings. This review includes an evaluation of the traffic impact of proposed land use changes. The traffic impact evaluation examines the potential effect of any future land use change on road segments in proximity to the site in question. Regarding potential traffic impacts, special consideration is given to roadways that do not meet the County's concurrency management policies. Approval of amendments that would increase trips on these facilities is discouraged. It should also be noted that approval of amendments that would increase

trips on facilities projected to be operating under backlogged or constrained conditions in future years shall be discouraged as well.

Community Redevelopment

In terms of land use activity, higher density, mixed-use development is advantageous for encouraging alternative modes of transportation such as transit and walking. In areas where residential populations exist in proximity to commercial activity, the choice to use these alternative modes is more attractive for reasons of convenience.³ Pinellas County supports higher density and mixed-use development in or proximate to urban centers through the LPA's involvement in reviewing community redevelopment plans. The plans are submitted by municipal governments requesting the BCC to approve tax increment financing assistance, under the terms of Chapter 163, Part 3, F.S. The LPA review considers whether the plans are consistent with Chapter 163, Part 3, F.S., as well as the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan and the MPO Long Range Transportation Plan. Over the years, Pinellas County has approved several municipal redevelopment plans requesting assistance for redevelopment areas in St. Petersburg, Gulfport, Safety Harbor, Pinellas Park, Dunedin and Clearwater.

Scenic/Non-Commercial Corridors

In the 1960s, the look of America's highways was raised to a level of national consciousness. Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev, in their 1963 book Man-Made America called out the need for better roadway planning and design. With their strong criticisms of the prevalence of roadside clutter, Lady Bird Johnson was moved to start a national highway beautification program.⁴ This led to the Highway Beautification Act, signed into Law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965. Reflecting the national concern over the appearance of road corridors, Pinellas County established its scenic/noncommercial corridor program in 1964. The newly realigned Ridge Road (County Road 321) extending from Welch Causeway to East Bay Drive became the County's first scenic/noncommercial corridor at this time. Between 1975 and 1977, the cities of Dunedin, Clearwater and the BCC designated portions of Curlew Road, Belcher Road and McMullen-Booth Road as scenic/noncommercial corridors. In 1978, the Pinellas Planning Council (PPC), which has countywide planning responsibilities, incorporated the scenic/noncommercial corridor concept into its planning program. The PPC designated scenic/noncommercial corridors on the Countywide Future Land Use Plan that were recognized by two or more local governments. Scenic/noncommercial corridors in Pinellas County are shown in Figure 2-1.

The County's initiation of the scenic/noncommercial corridor designation was prompted by a concern over the affects of traditional development patterns on recently-improved roadways. A surge in traffic volumes overwhelming the added capacity in a short period of time and the cluttered landscape accompanying new development attracted to the corridor were end products the County wished to avoid. Consequently, the scenic/noncommercial corridor designation was established to protect the traffic-carrying capacity and aesthetic qualities of roadways considered most important in terms of traffic circulation and scenic value.

The County's approach to implementing its scenic/noncommercial corridor program revolves around the processes of reviewing proposed FLUM amendments and controlling the location of off-premise signs. The County implements other techniques, such as access management, preservation of open space and landscaping that support its scenic/noncommercial corridor policies. However, other than FLUM amendment review and off-premise sign control, the application of these techniques is not limited to scenic/noncommercial corridors; rather they are applied throughout the County's transportation system. Access management is discussed below as it relates to scenic/noncommercial corridors. The preservation of open space areas occurs through the implementation of the Recreation and Open Space Element and the Land Development Code. Landscaping is implemented through the County's highway beautification efforts, which are addressed later in this Chapter.

Review of Proposed FLUM Amendments

The Future Land Use and Quality Communities Element contains policies that discourage nonresidential development and encourage low density residential development along designated scenic/noncommercial corridors. These policies are carried out through the FLUM amendment review process. Absent special circumstances, the LPA recommends that FLUM amendments requesting nonresidential or high density residential development be denied.

Sign Regulation

The County also implements its scenic/noncommercial corridor policies through the regulation of off-premise signs (e.g., billboards). The Comprehensive Zoning Section of the Land Development Code restricts the location of off-premise signs on properties abutting scenic/noncommercial corridor rights-of-way. This Section of the Land Development Code is applied in the process of reviewing permit applications and site plans.

Access Management

One of the land use management techniques associated with the scenic/noncommercial corridor concept is access management. The Access Management Section of the Land Development Code includes classification standards for driveway connection and median openings on County jurisdictional roadways. These standards are used as a guide in the review of right-of-way utilization permits submitted to the County. Scenic/noncommercial corridors such as McMullen-Booth Road and East Lake Road are designated in the Access Management Section of the Code as Class Two and Three facilities, respectively, for driveway connection spacing. These designations stipulate that driveway connections must be spaced more than 680 feet apart (Class Two) and greater than or equal to 460 feet apart (Class Three). These spacing distances are generally compatible with scenic/noncommercial corridor policies. However, driveway connection classifications on other scenic/noncommercial corridors allow for much shorter distances. Some of these shorter distances are warranted along facilities where existing and future land use patterns preclude limiting driveway spacing as it currently exists.

Access management on scenic/noncommercial corridors as well as other facilities is also considered in the design of roadway construction projects. These projects are designed to

limit roadway access points and median openings and to preclude new driveway connections to the extent possible. The County's road construction projects are implemented through the application of the Capital Improvement Program as reflected in the Capital Improvements Element.

Transportation Demand Forecasting

To project future traffic volumes and travel patterns on its roadways, Pinellas County relies on the Tampa Bay Regional Transportation Planning Model (TBRPM), as mandated by the Florida Department of Transportation. The Pinellas County MPO is responsible for managing the process of transportation forecasting utilizing the TBRPM in cooperation with FDOT and the Pasco and Hillsborough County MPOs. The major roads of these counties comprise the TBRPM road network. Pinellas County data needed for input into the TBRPM modeling process is generated by County staff.

The TBRPM model simulates future travel conditions based on trip attraction and production variables. Trip attraction variables determine travel demand based on the location and type of employment industries. Production variables determine the number and locations of trips coming from residential land uses. Information on employment and residential land uses (i.e., dwelling unit counts) is derived from the existing and future land use databases residing in the County's GIS. The distribution patterns of vehicles traveling between attraction and generation points is based largely on available roadway capacity.

Rule 9J-5, FAC, Requirements for Transportation/Land Use Analysis

Rule 9J-5, FAC, places a heavy emphasis on the coordination of transportation and future land use planning. The Rule requires an analysis of the compatibility between these elements and an evaluation of alternative land use scenarios involving increased densities/intensities and mixed uses designed to allow more efficient transportation solutions. These transportation solutions involve increasing the demand for alternative travel modes such as mass transit, walking and bicycling and discouraging the demand for single-occupant vehicle travel. The demand for these travel modes is increased in areas where mixed-use and higher density/intensity development exists. Recognizing the importance of these land use patterns and travel modes to the economic vitality of urban centers, the County supports mixed-use and higher density/intensity development in downtown areas. With regard to the unincorporated areas, Pinellas County will continue to have a relatively low overall density with areas of local concentration that will be designed to create dynamic urban environments where people are encouraged to bicycle, walk or to utilize transit service.

Future Land Use Conditions, Public Facility and Service Demands

As noted in Chapter One, approximately five percent of the County's net land area contains vacant land suitable for development. Most of this vacant land is dispersed throughout the County on small subdivided parcels or on large tracts that are vested within developments of regional impact (e.g., Gateway and Carillon in mid Pinellas County, Tampa Bay Park of Commerce in the Oldsmar Area and Tarpon Lake Villages in the northeast portion of the County). The short supply of larger tracts of vacant developable land limits opportunities to increase FLUM densities/intensities by way of new development.

Another factor limiting the County's capacity to consider large scale increases in FLUM densities and intensities is the demand such changes would place on public services and facilities. For services and facilities such as potable water supply, solid waste and roads, the County must ensure sufficient capacity is available to serve existing and future population growth. Changing FLUM designations to the extent that alternative transportation modes would become significant in the transportation system of a given area also increases the demand on other services and facilities. Consequently, any advantage that could be gained in terms of pedestrian, mass transit or bicycle activity could be outweighed by the impact such FLUM changes would have on other public services and facilities.

Given the limitations of increasing FLUM densities/intensities as to promote more efficient transportation solutions, the Transportation Element relies on the application of the Site Plan Review Process, the Land Development Code, the Concurrency Management System and the implementation of the Capital Improvements Element to encourage alternative modes. Discussion of these implementation mechanisms as they apply to encouraging mass transit use, bicycle and pedestrian activity and the reduction of single-occupant vehicle travel are provided in Chapters Four and Five.

In terms of mixed land use activity, the County allows such development on properties designated on the FLUM as Residential/Office/Retail and Residential Office. Pinellas County also has policies and a program that allows for the mixing of affordable housing development and commercial land use activities.

Livable Communities

As mentioned previously, Pinellas County plans to revise its Land Development Code in 2009 to implement livable community policies contained in the Future Land Use and Quality Communities Element. The implementation of these policies will introduce requirements and incentives in the Code to facilitate the implementation of livable community improvements and strategies in land development and CIP projects. This will be the most far reaching attempt by Pinellas County to date to integrate land use and transportation planning as it will seek to encourage alternative modes of travel by creating a built environment that is conducive and inviting for people to walk, bicycle or to use transit.

Pinellas Mobility Initiative (PMI)

Alternative land use scenarios, including density/intensity increases and mixed land use patterns related to the support of future mass transit systems in Pinellas County continue to be analyzed on a county-wide basis through the MPO-sponsored Pinellas Mobility Initiative (PMI). Pursuant to the requirements of SAFETEA-LU, the purpose of the PMI is to analyze multi-modal solutions to address long-term transportation needs requiring Federal investment. Led by the PMI Steering Committee, this effort to date has resulted in a "locally preferred" transportation solution involving a fixed guideway system serving St. Petersburg, Clearwater and the Beach communities. The PMI Committee has more recently been involved in a project to evaluate the feasibility of a monorail system from downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Beach, studying the potential for commuter rail service on the CSX rail line as well as the development of a bus rapid transit (BRT) service from

downtown St. Petersburg to the beaches and a countywide BRT Plan. More information concerning the PMI is provided in Chapter Five.

Highway Beautification

With development patterns along its major roads already well-established, landscaping represents one of the most effective approaches to enhancing the appearance of road corridors in Pinellas County. The County currently channels its landscaping efforts through the implementation of its CIP and CIE. For each road improvement scheduled in the CIP/CIE, the County sets aside a portion of the project funds for landscaping. There is \$3.6 million in Penny for Pinellas revenue set aside for highway beautification in the FY 2007/08 CIP.

All road improvement projects include landscaping using native and drought-tolerant plants. In addition to beautifying the landscape, the County uses this type of vegetation to demonstrate its value for purposes of water conservation. These projects have been partly paid for using Federal and State grants, and Pinellas County shall continue to pursue these funds as part of its continuing highway beautification program.

Endnotes

Chapter Two

1. Pinellas County Planning Department, Pinellas County Historical Background, April 1995. p. 66.
2. Metropolitan Dade County Planning Department, The Road Corridor: An Element of Urban Design, August 1988, p. 13.
3. More detailed discussion on the relationship of transportation and higher density/mixed land uses is provided in Chapter Five.
4. Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev, Man-made America: Chaos or Control?, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1963).