



THE PLANNING GAZETTE

*A Newsletter of the Pinellas County Planning Department
and the Metropolitan Planning Organization*

Volume 9, Number 1

Winter 2003

Pinellas County Awarded \$6.6 Million For Latest Wall Springs Land Acquisition

The results are in and Pinellas County is number one. In its bid for \$6.6 million in State grant monies to acquire 84 acres of coastal land in Wall Springs, Pinellas County placed first among 114 other proposals vying for funding under the Forever Florida Grant Program. The rankings were announced on November 14, 2002. The county's grant award is expected to be released in the spring of 2003. Since the county has already purchased this site, the grant monies will go back into its endangered lands account to help pay off the bond used for the purchase.

Administered by the Florida Communities Trust, the Forever Florida Program is intended to sup-



The purchase of this 84-acre site in Wall Springs gives the county over 200 acres of contiguous preservation and recreational land along the Gulf Coast.

port local government efforts to acquire environmental and recreational lands in accordance with their comprehensive plans. The grant award for this application titled, Wall Springs Coastal Addition II, will be the second the county has received for the acquisition of coastal lands in this unique area of northern Pinellas County. The first award, Wall Springs Coastal Addition I, was received this past summer. It was the first grant awarded under the new Forever Florida Program and Governor Bush traveled to Pinellas County to present the \$3.5 million award to the Board of County Commissioners in the summer of 2002.

Inside...

Page 2, *Transportation Impact Fee Rates Increase*

Page 3, *Planning To Stay Initiative Focuses on Quality of Life in Pinellas*

Page 4, *PSTA To Introduce Premium Bus Service for Inter-county Travelers*

Page 5, *Lealman Revitalization Plan Put into Action*

Page 6, *Study Targets McMullen-Booth Road Corridor*

Page 7, *MPO Elects New Officers*

Page 8, *Lealman Park Re-opens*

continued on page 7...

Board Approves Increase in Impact Fee Rates

Permit applications in Pinellas County will be more expensive this year as the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) approved an 18 percent increase in transportation impact fee rates, phased in over the next two years, on December 3, 2002. Transportation impact fees are charged to all permit applicants proposing development projects that add more vehicle trips to the surrounding roadways. The rate increase, which will be phased in at nine percent this year and nine percent the following year, is the result of a corresponding rise in construction costs. The rate increases along with other changes introduced with the Board action took effect on January 1.

Transportation impact fees are assessed through the application of the Pinellas County Transportation Impact Fee Ordinance (TIFO), which is applied across jurisdictional lines in all 24 municipalities and unincorporated Pinellas County. Impact fees are based on the premise that development pay a proportionate share of the costs necessary to provide public services and facilities needed to accommodate their impacts.

The new construction cost figure is \$2.2 million for one-lane mile of roadway. It was \$1.6 million in 1998, the last time the Ordinance was updated. The proposed Ordinance amendments were approved by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on October 9, 2002. Under the terms of the Ordinance, which was originally adopted in 1986, the MPO is required to review the impact fee schedule every two years and authorize any necessary adjustments for adoption by the BCC.

In addition to the rate increase, other significant changes include the following:

- Revision of rates for individual land use categories and the introduction of new categories;
- Allowing for the use of impact fee monies for non-highway projects such as bus shelters and sidewalks;



New development and redevelopment projects in Pinellas County are assessed impact fees based on the number of new vehicle trips they generate.

- Allowing for impact fee revenue to be spent in districts not adjacent to those where the fees were originated in situations where there is a benefit to the originating district; and
- Clarifying the application of the fee schedule used in downtown areas.

One of the other issues drawing much attention was the no-fee zone concept. No-fee zones are areas where development projects are exempt from paying transportation impact fees. This designation recognizes areas where existing infrastructure is sufficient and, therefore, local governments are willing to forgo the collection of impact fees to provide an incentive for development within these areas. There are currently three no-fee zones in St. Petersburg, Pinellas Park and Safety Harbor. At their October meeting, the MPO voted to allow these zones to expire in 2004 and not to allow any new applications for no-fee zones to exceed the time frame of this expiration year. Lastly, the MPO directed that the no-fee zone provisions be revisited to determine whether they should be permanently removed.

A task force headed by BCC member Robert Stewart has been assembled for the purpose of examining the TIFO in its entirety as well as related issues pertaining to impact fees as a transportation revenue source in Pinellas County. The first meeting of the task force will take place on February 12 at 10:30 a.m. at the Planning Department Conference Room.

“Planning To Stay” Initiative Focuses on Enhancing Quality of Life Benefits

Is Pinellas County one of the most desirable places to live and work in the United States? Although this question invites much debate, county planners and elected officials embrace the vision that it will become a more vibrant and unique place, one where people want to stay. On December 17, 2002, the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) launched this vision into reality with the approval of the latest element of the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan, *Planning To Stay*, for review by the Florida Department of Community Affairs (FDCA). Final adoption of the element by the BCC is anticipated to occur in the spring of 2003.

“With a limited supply of vacant land available, the future growth of the county will revolve around redevelopment rather than on new development. Our objective is to ensure this redevelopment activity will create more liveable communities in Pinellas County,” explained General Planning Administrator, Gordon Beardslee. *Planning To Stay* seeks to direct redevelopment activity toward this end by establishing 38 “working principles” designed to guide the county’s policies and decision making in the areas of urban planning and design, the economy, housing and transportation. This allows the county to better anticipate and respond to the changing needs of its citizens as the focus shifts from rapid growth of vacant land to infill development and redevelopment.

With less than six percent of the county’s land area vacant and suitable for development, Pinellas County is in a state of near buildout. Not only does this apply upward pressure on land

costs, a shrinking supply of developable land also limits the ability of industrial firms to expand as well as the county’s ability to find land for businesses seeking re-location. With buildout fast approaching, Pinellas County is not in a position to attract businesses with cheaper land costs. Consequently, the new element contends that the county will need to rely more on quality of life benefits to retain and recruit businesses. “That means quality in the types of jobs that are created, the built and natural environment, neighborhoods, the educational system and cultural amenities,” stated Gordon.



This computer enhanced photograph of Old Palm Harbor at the intersection of Florida Avenue and Omaha Circle provides an example of the type of urban design techniques that are important to creating a “sense of place” in the County.

Central to the county’s efforts to create a quality environment in these areas is the redevelopment and re-design of urban centers. “*Planning To Stay*” embraces the idea that the design and appearance of downtown areas, neighborhoods and road corridors are paramount to the quality of life the county affords its residents.

Gordon indicated that *Planning To Stay* reaffirms certain BCC policies and, in other cases, will require modification of existing policies or the creation of new ones. He anticipates initiatives will be pursued to make sure that; 1) upward pressures on housing costs do not render the county too expensive for certain income groups; 2) land use patterns along major road corridors are more attractive and efficient; 3) the diverse characteristics of local communities will be supported; 4) adequate public access to the county’s natural assets (e.g., beaches, water bodies) will be protected; 5) the county retains a well-trained workforce and a strong economy; 6) viable transporta-

continued on page 7...

Premium Commuter Bus Service on the Way

With cup holders, comfortable high back reclining seats, overhead reading lights, headphone and computer jacks, and cool air-conditioned comfort, you might think you are riding on a jet. Starting April 2003, these features will be part of the experience of the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority's (PSTA) Route 300X Tampa Express.

This new weekday service will originate from a Park 'n' Ride facility near the intersection of Starkey and Ulmerton Roads, travel up Ulmerton to another Park 'n' Ride proximate to the St. Petersburg Clearwater International Airport and then continue to Tampa.

Two studies conducted by the MPO and PSTA were instrumental in bringing this new service to the Tampa Bay Area. The 2001 PSTA Market Research Study indicated a great need for commuter bus service to Tampa via the mid-county Howard Frankland Bridge, currently the only bridge across the bay without bus service. PSTA's 100X provides service over the Gandy Bridge while HARTline's 200X connects travelers between Clearwater and Tampa by way of the Courtney Campbell Causeway.

The second study, the SR688/1-275 Transit Corridor Study, helped bring the service need into reality. By examining demographic information, it was determined that after the first two years of operation approximately 90,000 rides would be taken. The study helped determine the proposed route and stop locations. It also identified potential local, state and federal funding sources to off-set the initial estimated \$3 million start up capital costs.

So, why the premium service? "It's no secret, public transit is in direct competition with the car," says Janet Recca, PSTA's Director of Marketing. "We've followed the lead of larger transit properties such as New Jersey and Washington, D.C. and we're applying what works for them." To that end, PSTA has ordered ten luxury buses, priced

at over \$400,000 each and made by Motor Coach Industries (MCI), to operate this service and the 100X.

Commuters riding these routes will be able to read, sit back, relax, chat on their cell phones or work on their laptops. On the 300X, riders will have their choice of 14 trips per day with a one way trip expected to take about 47 minutes during rush hour traffic.



The new Route 300X from Pinellas Park to Tampa via the Howard Frankland Bridge will use handicapped accessible premium commuter buses similar to the one pictured above.

Should they encounter an unexpected emergency or have to work overtime that will keep them later than the route's service hours, they can take advantage of Bay Area Commuter Services (BACS) Guaranteed Ride Home Program. Passengers who ride at least two days per week can register for this service, which provides up to eight free taxi rides home per year. Priced the same as PSTA's other premium service at \$1.50 per trip and \$27.00 for a 20-Ride Premium GO Card, this express bus service promises to be one of the best commuting values on either side of the bridge.

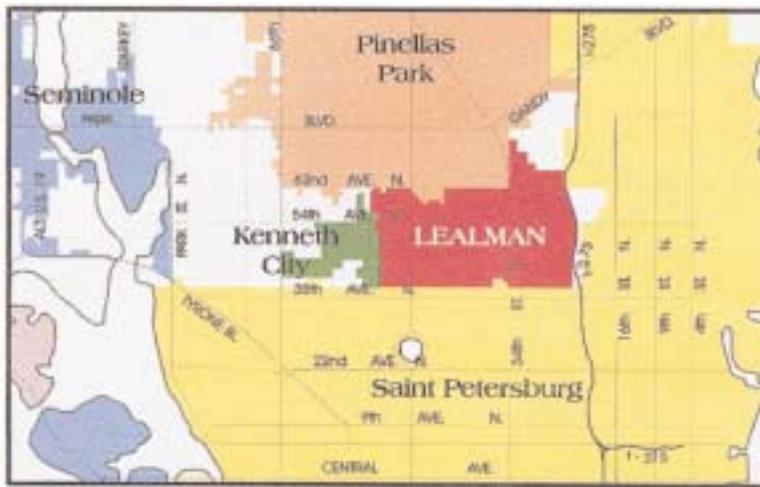
For more information, visit the PSTA website at www.psta.net.

LEALMAN COMMUNITY PROMOTES SENSE OF IDENTITY

In 2002, the Lealman Community began efforts to implement a key component of their Revitalization Plan approved by the Board of County Commissioners the previous year by working to establish a stronger identity for the community. This has become an issue of increasing concern for Lealman residents as their neighboring cities have continued to actively pursue annexation of unincorporated land. This has prompted some Lealman residents to explore the idea of incorporation.

An incorporation feasibility study conducted by county planners and budget officials with the involvement of representatives from the community and the Lealman Special Fire Control District was completed in July. Included in the study is an approximation of the fiscal impacts of incorporation. The Lealman Community Association is currently in the process of evaluating the results of the study.

In June 2002, at the request of the community, the BCC amended Lealman's planning area boundaries for the purpose of preventing annexations by surrounding municipalities until an agreement could be reached with the adjacent cities regarding these boundaries. Pinellas County began to re-evaluate the county's planning area boundaries at the request of representatives from the Lealman community. The current planning area boundaries were set in place by a countywide referendum in 2000, and have been used since then to represent areas for potential municipal growth and expansion by voluntary annexation of unincorporated property.



Members of the Lealman community were increasingly concerned over the current boundaries, believing they divided the community and promoted annexation of their business and commercial properties by surrounding municipalities. This, in turn, impacted their ability to support the Lealman Special Fire Control District (as properties were annexed, it left a smaller tax base to support the Lealman Special Fire Control District). Discussions with surrounding municipalities regarding Lealman's planning area boundaries are expected to continue well into 2003.

Lealman's desire to promote and retain its identity received a boost in November 2002, when the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) agreed to post signs

along Interstate-275 at the 54th Avenue North exit, directing traffic to Lealman. In addition, they agreed to place the Lealman area on the official state transportation map. Concurrent with these efforts, Pinellas County installed "Welcome to Lealman" signs along several locations in Lealman, including 54th Avenue North and 49th Street. The signs are an important step for the community as they help to reaffirm Lealman's standing as a distinct community in Pinellas County

For more information regarding the Lealman Revitalization Plan and associated activities, please contact the Planning Department at 464-8200 or Community Development at 464-8210. A copy of the incorporation feasibility study can be obtained at www.co.pinellas.fl.us/bcc/planning.

Corridor Study Targets McMullen-Booth Road

When adding lanes is no longer a viable option to reducing or alleviating traffic congestion on a busy road, what is the solution? This is what local residents, business owners and the MPO are looking to find out on McMullen-Booth Road through the development of the McMullen-Booth Road Corridor Strategy Plan.

On November 21, 2002, at Countryside High School, the MPO held a public workshop to discuss proposed strategies to be pursued through the plan. This included an evaluation of alternative transportation strategies such as enhanced commuter bus service, intersection improvements, ridesharing programs for workers, and the construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The meeting was the second workshop on the McMullen-Booth Corridor Strategy Plan. The first one was held on July 30, 2002.



Residents share their comments and ideas at the first public workshop on the McMullen-Booth Road Corridor Strategy Plan on July 30, 2002 at the Countryside Branch of the Clearwater Library.

“Enhancing transit service and improving signal timing on the corridor surfaced as the top priority strategies at the first workshop,” noted Transportation Planner Jairo Viafara, who is managing the project for the MPO. The Corridor Plan study area includes the entire section of McMullen-Booth Road from Gulf-To-Bay Boulevard to Tampa Road and adjacent neighborhoods in Clearwater to the west and Safety Harbor to the east. Efforts to develop the Plan are supported by \$125 thousand in Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program funds appropriated from the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

McMullen-Booth Road underwent major recon-

struction in the 1990s. It was improved to a six-lane roadway from Gulf-To-Bay Boulevard to Main Street in 1991 and from Main Street to Curlew Road in 1996. In addition, construction on the Bayside Bridge was completed in 1993. With these improvements and the opening of the Bayside Bridge, traffic volumes on McMullen-Booth Road have increased substantially. The annual average daily traffic (AADT) between Gulf-To-Bay Boulevard and Curlew Road increased by 24 percent, from an average of 51,179 in 1996 to 63,315 in 2001.

Nearly the entire corridor currently operates at a deficient level of service (LOS) during the peak hour and the volumes exceed no less than 95 percent of the physical capacity of the roadway. With the road already improved to a six-lane facility, reconstructing it to add more vehicle-carrying capacity is not a feasible solution.

An implementation and monitoring program based on the input received at the workshops as well as the results of the study is currently being developed. This program along with the study recommendations will be summarized in the final report which is scheduled for review by the MPO in February. The McMullen-Booth Road Corridor Strategy Plan is part of the MPO Congestion Management System (CMS) Program. The CMS is based on TEA-21 regulations that call for MPOs to examine all possible transportation improvement alternatives before considering road expansion to resolve operational problems on roadways.

Current information on the Corridor Strategy Plan is available through the MPO website (www.co.pinellas.fl.us/mpo/McMullen).

Forever Florida Grant...

...continued from page 1

Combined with Wall Springs Park, these two sites give the County over 200 contiguous acres of environmentally sensitive and recreational land.

Both of the Wall Springs Coastal Additions will be integrated into the existing Wall Springs Park property. The Coastal Additions will undergo site restoration to remove the exotic vegetation and restore the natural plant communities. But overall, the sites are in good environmental condition and represent a large area of ecologically important sandhill and saltmarsh habitat.

Some of the plans for the Wall Springs Coastal Additions include development of a marked canoe/kayak trail, as well as hiking trails and interpretive signs explaining the coastal environment and the cultural history of the area. The

Planning To Stay...

...continued from page 3

tion alternatives to the automobile are fully explored; and 7) efforts to retain or improve the quality of local neighborhoods will be emphasized.

Planning To Stay also reflects the outcome of discussions of a 1997 BCC Visioning Workshop, where the Board members agreed that efforts should be made to make the county a place

Wall Springs Complex is accessible from the Pinellas Trail and with the addition of these 88 acres, it will become an even more important destination along the Trail, particularly as additional plans for the properties evolve in the near future. The addition of these sites to the County's recreational and environmental greenway system preserves very significant habitat resources while providing valuable public-use opportunities.

The preparation and submittal of both successful Florida Forever applications was a team effort, including Liz Freeman and Samantha Shorr-Zigante of the Planning Department, Mike Nahat from the Real Estate Division of General Services, and Craig Huegel from the Environmental Lands Division of the Department of Environmental Management, with assistance from Don Wilson of the Park Department.

where family and businesses want to stay and where children want to remain or return once they become adults. Once adopted, *Planning To Stay* will become the 13th element of the Comprehensive Plan, which contains data and analysis, policies, objectives and goals necessary to manage existing and future demand for public services, facilities and resources.

MPO Elects New Officers

At their December meeting, the MPO elected its new slate of officers for 2003. They are Dunedin Mayor John Doglione, Chairman; Board of County Commissioner Karen Seel, Vice Chairman; and St. Petersburg Councilman Richard Kriseman, Secretary/Treasurer. MPO members serve four year terms except for the Oldsmar/Safety Harbor/Tarpon Springs position, which is a two-year term on a bi-annual rotating basis. All voting representatives on the 11-member board are elected officials representing the local governments of Pinellas County and the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority. The Florida Department of Transportation District 7 Secretary is a non-voting member.

THE PLANNING GAZETTE

Editor: Al Bartolotta
Correspondence: Linda Everett
Graphics/Photography: Edd Weimar, Chip Haynes
Circulation/Distribution: Grace Gomez, Irene Estes

The PLANNING GAZETTE is published by the employees of the Pinellas County Planning Department, 600 Cleveland Street, Suite 750, Clearwater, FL 33755.
Phone: 727-464-8200. Fax: 727-464-8201.
Email: leverett@co.pinellas.fl.us.
MPO website: www.co.pinellas.fl.us/mpo. Planning Department website: www.co.pinellas.fl.us/bcc/planning

Commissioners, Community Celebrate Re-opening of Lealman Park

On November 16, 2002, with stormy weather looming on the horizon, Lealman Park was re-dedicated by the Board of County Commissioners (BCC). The parkland, located along 54th Avenue North in central Lealman, between 37th Street and 39th Street, was originally purchased by the county in 1977, and first opened as Lealman Park in 1980.

Over time though it had fallen into disrepair. This was a particular sore point for the community and the desire to make it a focal point of the Lealman area became a key issue in the development of the Revitalization Plan for the community. The Lealman Community Revitalization Plan was adopted by the BCC in July 2001. Maintenance of the park will now be carried out by Pinellas County Park Department staff who are currently assigned to nearby Sawgrass Lake Park.

The re-dedication ceremonies were conducted by Chairman of the Pinellas County Commission, Barbara Sheen Todd, County Commissioner, Ken Welch and County Administrator, Stephen Spratt. Also in attendance were the mayors of Pinellas Park and Kenneth City, Elizabeth Warren, Pinellas County Park Director and Ray Neri of the Lealman Community Association.



The newly equipped playground is the centerpiece of the revitalized Lealman Park, which opened in November, 2002.

Despite a steady drizzle, there was a strong turnout from the neighborhood as evidenced by the many children enjoying the new playground equipment and participating in arts and crafts. Lealman's Revitalization Team, Family Center and Community Association provided food and beverages. Artwork created by children from Lealman Elementary School was on display.