



MEETING MINUTES

Lealman CRA Advisory Committee

Wednesday, July 22, 2026 at 6PM

Committee Member Present In-Person: Kim Blessinger, Tony Coryn, Charles Flynt, Jeremy Heath, Jennifer Post, Tahisia Scantling, Dominic Howarth

Committee Members Absent: Tyler Payne, Kenneth Williams

Pinellas County Staff Present: Amy Davis, Cameron Ehmgig, Paul Miselis, Adam Pedzich, Colan Treml, Jason Ester (Virtual)

I. Call to Order: Chair Kim Blessinger called meeting to order at 6:00pm.

II. Introductions

III. Citizens Input

- Frank Matowitz: Leads a group called “Lealman Neighbors”. Frank had spoke at a CRA Committee meeting a few years ago, and the CRA board at that time came up with a solution to set aside \$250,000 for the Sherrif’s department to help combat issues with criminal activities being operated out of rental properties. Deputies face issues with the renters and property owners cooperating, and with getting reassigned to calls outside of the CRA. Committee member clarified that the CRA board is legally not able to pay for the salaries of the Pinellas County Sherrif’s Office.

IV. Approval of Minutes: Chair Kim Blessinger requested a motion to approve the 5-27-2026 minutes. Motion by Tony Coryn, seconded by Dominic Howarth. Vote: Approved unanimously with no changes.

V. Lealman CRA Agenda Items

1) Joe’s Creek Restoration/Greenway Trail Project (Paul Miselis, Stormwater Division Manager)

- Public Information Meeting will be scheduled soon.
- Currently in design phase, estimated to complete design in summer 2027
- The creek will be widened throughout the project area, creek banks will be stabilized to reduce erosion, and Florida-Friendly plantings will line the creek to increase the quantity and diversity of aquatic and wetland habitats. The restoration project is focused on providing flood relief, preventing erosion and degradation of the creek, and to provide pedestrian and bicycle connectivity with the Greenway Trail, which will connect to the Pinellas Trail at 71st St. N.
- Committee member asked if these changes would make kayak access feasible. Paul replied that there won’t be any designated kayak launches, but kayaking is possible when there’s enough water.
- Committee member mentioned that the trail will be located in her backyard. She brought up concerns about people walking through where her backyard is, as well as letters that were sent to homeonwers on 42nd Place regarding encroachments. Paul replied that there are some encroachments into the Right-of-Way, including fences and sheds and planters. He has been in contact with residents about these concerns, and he has assured them that they are getting revised surveys and plans and he will go through and identify encroachments that need to be moved.
- Committee member asked if there was any money set aside to help those who are unable to afford to move a fence. Paul replied that the property owner is responsible for moving them if it is confirmed to be an encroachment.



- Committee member asked about after-hours trail access if the trail is not gated. Paul clarified that the trail will operate like the Pinellas Trail and have signs posted with the hours of operation, and that the connection through Ray Neri Park will be gated in accordance with the park's hours of operation.

2) LEX Gym Hardening Federal Grant (Adam Pedzich, Response and Recovery Manager)

- Presented by Response and Recovery Manager, Adam Pedzich
- The project is to harden the gymnasium building on LEX campus for sheltering
- LEX building was used extensively for sheltering special needs residents during the 2024 hurricane season
- Gym would be hardened to Cat 2 or 3 strength. The real benefit is having a building that is still standing after a worst-case scenario storm. 27% of housing surrounding LEX are mobile homes, which are particularly vulnerable to hurricane-force winds.
- Rebuilding the gym from scratch would be around \$10 million
- Grant=\$2,606,000, total project cost=\$5,395,000. CRA would cover 33% of the total project (\$1,764,000) and Penny for Pinellas would fill in the gap (\$1,025,000). There is a chance we could use CDBG-DR funding, but the tight turnaround for the grant submission meant submitting a realistic budget with the CRA covering the gap in funding.
- Committee member asked what percentage of the LEX shelter residents during the 2024 storms were Lealman residents. Adam responded that they don't get addresses for everybody sheltered. LEX is one of three County-owned sheltering facilities. LEX operated as a step-down shelter to help residents unable to return to their homes due to damage or utility outages.
- Committee member commented that this is another project where the CRA is subsidizing the county's needs. Also commented that this was the first that the committee is hearing that the gym is insufficient for sheltering.
- Staff proposed moving some funding from the FY27 allocation for Joe's Creek Industrial Park Infrastructure Improvements/stormwater storage project to fund the grant match.
- Vote for support: Motion by Jennifer Post, seconded by Charles Flynt, 1 committee member opposed

3) Property Tax Amendment Impact

- Proposed property tax amendment would increase the homestead exemption to \$150,000 from \$50,000. In year 2, it would increase the homestead exemption to \$250,000. Also establishes a path toward no property taxes for homes. Reduces cap for non-homestead taxable value from 10% to 5%. Different voting rules for adopting millage rate, and restrictions for how property tax revenue can be used.
- After 2 year period, taxable value will have reduced by 44%. In year 1, it would be a reduction of \$2.2 million in revenue, year 2 would be a reduction of \$2.8 million (cumulative). County has a millage rate for General Fund, MSTU's have their own millage for unincorporated, and cities set their own millage rates. County staff explained that the County cannot advocate for or against the Amendment, only educate.
- Committee member asked two questions: Can committee members advocate regarding the Amendment and asked if the County could sunset the CRA early if there was a financial need, County Attorney replied affirmatively to both.
- Committee member commented that Lealman has a lower home ownership rate (i.e., fewer homestead exemptions), and that the proposal would disproportionately impact Lealman residents.

4) Recap of Public Art Projects completed in past 2 years



- Mural on 34th St. (Where Good Things Grow by Frankie G.) has been completed
- Neri Park restroom facility mural was refreshed
- Total of 18 Lealman CRA Creative Pinellas artworks completed between 2021 and 2026, including murals and signal/utility box wraps
- Committee member asked about Creative Pinellas' funding, staff confirmed that their funding has changed.

VI. Additional Lealman CRA and Non-CRA Updates by Colan Trembl and Amy Davis

- Massive influx of Residential applications due to sending out a postcard to all residents. Applications were briefly closed, they are now reopened
- GAI Consultant was chosen for CRA Plan update. Committee will hear from them in the August meeting. Inspire Placemaking Collective was chosen for professional services.
- 3rd Joe's Creek Mixer on June 2nd: Discussed Master Plan, challenges with stormwater, and the three main projects (stormwater storage, seawalls on privately owned property, and culvert). 4th mixer scheduled for December.
- Lealman Heights: Habitat homes are being built, invited members to the dedications in the next couple of months. Townhomes to begin construction.
- Lealman Park Improvement scope is completed.
- Property on 54th Ave. N. owned by Frontier, still in discussion, preparing legal items needed to move forward.
- DRC case: Pagan Towing on 54th Ave. N., coming into compliance with site plan.
- Early Assistance meeting for Church of God on 46th St. N. just north of 46th Ave. N. The idea is to create parking and add a building.
- Construction on South side of 54th Ave. N. near veterinarian office is an expansion of the vet office.
- Pond Beautification is complete, growth was slow by lack of rain
- 4th of July Fireworks event was a great community event, lots of families and couples
- Tree Planting (Urban Forestry department): Lealman has a low tree canopy. The latest tree planting was on 57th Ave. N., 76 trees were planted. Next two areas of focus will be Arcadian Heights and Holdcroft Heights.
- 28th St. sidewalk is well under way, and should be completed soon
- Ray Neri dog park is officially opened. Flag with lights has been installed.
- 46th Ave. N. sidewalk is completed, small gap near CSX railroad. There will be a separate project to close this gap and improve the railroad crossing.

VII. Advisory Committee Member Comments

- Committee member asked about the Lealman Park Improvement Project. The scope of work is completed, has to be shopped around to design firms, and then the sub-committee will be called together.
- Committee member mentioned the Duke Energy contract negotiations with each city. Duke is agreeing to bury power and utility lines in St. Pete, Largo, and Clearwater. Asked if the committee could be informed if Duke has plans to bury utilities. Another committee member mentioned that, in their neighborhood, Duke replaced the wooden poles with the concrete ones instead of burying the lines.

VIII. Adjourn: Motion by Jennifer Post, seconded by Dominic Howarth. Meeting adjourned 7:46pm.