

April 14, 2021

Please note that this summary has not been approved as the official minutes of the board.

THE PLANNING COUNCIL AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION FOR PINELLAS COUNTY

The Forward Pinellas Board held this public meeting in person on April 14, 2021 at 1 p.m. in the Magnolia Room at Pinellas County Cooperative Extension. Presenters and members of the public also had the opportunity to participate virtually to ensure public safety in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please see the following link for more information about virtual meeting [policies and procedures](#).

The board unanimously approved “Innovations for Target Employment and Jobs Access” as a new [SPOTlight emphasis area](#)

After a presentation from Whit Blanton, the board approved “Innovations for Target Employment and Jobs Access” as a new [SPOTlight emphasis area](#), focusing on innovations for the future of the target employment and industrial land use categories in the context of redevelopment, jobs access, affordable housing, mixed-use development and walkable, transit-accessible places.

The focus will entail the following activities:

- Updating the Target Employment & Industrial Lands Study from 2008 in partnership with Pinellas County Economic Development
 - Planning for redevelopment within Investment Corridors defined in the 2045 Advantage Pinellas Long Range Transportation Plan to link housing, transit, access to jobs and jobs training
 - Establishing a design studio pilot program in partnership with the Pinellas County Housing & Community Development Department to help identify and visualize innovative redevelopment
 - Committing to regional multimodal access to jobs/job training opportunities countywide
 - Addressing equity and safety to overcome barriers to employment and jobs access, and
 - Keeping a focus on Gateway Master Plan implementation through the Gateway Partnership
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- Vice Mayor Merz was in favor of this emphasis area and felt it addressed comments made at the January board workshop. He expressed concern to ensure we found a customized solution for evaluation criteria. For example, Industrial lands need to be reviewed differently than other lands. He also appreciated the partnership with Economic Development.
 - Chair Rice was also in favor of this emphasis area stating that it maintains focus on important issues. She also believes we should adopt the ideas of equity and safety into our way of thinking and these values should inform everything we do.

Preview of the Proposed FY22 Pinellas Planning Council (PPC) Budget

Rodney Chatman presented the budget outline for FY22 that aims to address several fiscal challenges. Operating Expenses are projected to increase by \$543,219 to support the new SPOTlight Emphasis Area work products, absorb reductions in cash match contributions by Pinellas County and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) for operating grants, address rising Intergovernmental Service Charges, and provide adequate resources to accomplish other agency priorities. To maintain current levels of service at Forward Pinellas, staff is proposing a millage increase from 0.0150 to 0.0160. The median price of a home in Pinellas County is \$200,000, and homeowners are paying \$3.00 to fund the PPC at the current 0.0150 millage rate. The average Pinellas County homeowner would pay \$3.20, or \$0.20 in additional property taxes annually if the PPC's millage rate is returned to 2015/16 levels. Forward Pinellas will continue to refine the budget over the next few months based on further direction from the board, as well as updated financial projections. Staff will bring the FY22 budget and millage rate to the board meeting in for action in June or July.

- Chair Rice clarified with staff that while some of the additional operating expenses were one-time, others were reoccurring.
 - Mr. Blanton explained Forward Pinellas previously decreased its millage rate to be fiscally responsible when those revenues were not needed. However, those reserves no longer exist and the agency can't sustain its current operations without adjustment in revenues as operating costs increase.
- Vice Mayor Merz asked if there were alternatives to the HR software "OPUS," brought up at the Board Workshop in January, that could save us additional costs.
 - Mr. Blanton stated that while there are software purchases occurring, a replacement for OPUS is not in the budget yet. However, we could see this, along with several other unavoidable increases down the road. This is another example of why we need to prepare for anticipated budget increases now.
- Commissioner Eggers stated that it was important to understand further what's driving the increases, noting that we've been fiscally careful and this is a tough year for a millage increase.
- Mayor Bujalski expressed her support for maintaining our levels of service, especially concerning local assistance for small cities. She felt having that connection where we don't stop at city lines is invaluable. She suggested looking at Pinellas County's administrative expenses to see if there's any way to cut additional costs.
 - Mr. Blanton noted that the Forward Pinellas team has been working closely with the Pinellas County Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to understand costs and identify any unnecessary expenses. He stated that five years ago, when the Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Pinellas Planning Council merged to become Forward Pinellas, demand for our services and collaboration increased while we chose to cut back our revenues. Mr. Blanton expressed that he doesn't want to have to reduce our level of service to our local partners in the future.

Transit-Oriented Development Updates

Christina Mendoza led a presentation on the benefits of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), a concept encouraging mixed uses that provides an opportunity for communities to grow strategically around transportation options. Forward Pinellas has created a [Knowledge Exchange Series](#) on TOD and is currently working in partnership with the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) and the cities of St. Petersburg and South Pasadena to develop a TOD Strategic Plan for the SunRunner Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridor. In addition, staff discussed how this work provides a case study for TOD to further promote walkability, equitable access, and better overall quality of life throughout different corridors in Pinellas County.

- Commissioner Eggers articulated his support for TOD and asked that as we develop corridors that we also ensure a balanced commercial presence, particularly concerning apartment complexes. He encouraged staff to work with local jurisdictions to set aside some areas for a mix of uses, including single-family homes rather than high-density apartments.
 - Mr. Chatman noted that increased residential density creates market demand along a corridor, which will create more market demand for supporting services.
 - Mr. Blanton echoed that TOD is a comprehensive corridor approach, and as such, every station area doesn't have to be a perfect mixed-use but rather can be customized for each community's needs to create destinations.
- Commissioner Seel said she was happy to see the board discussing TOD in our future and excited to see the benefits this will bring to Pinellas.
- Mayor Bujalski asked about the current status of the SunRunner BRT project in St. Pete Beach and South Pasadena.
 - Mr. Blanton explained that while these cities originally weren't in favor of the SunRunner BRT, they are in favor of redevelopment that's appropriate for their communities that will strengthen their vibrancy. He stated that Forward Pinellas is working closely with them to bring forward recommendations so the community can see the benefits.
- Chair Rice applauded the focus on TOD, noting that the City of St. Petersburg incorporated TOD in their Vision 2050 plan looking at opportunities to customize solutions for the community's needs. She also asked if there were some specific examples of successful Bus Rapid Transit projects using TOD and what differences there were with other TOD implementations.
 - Ms. Mendoza answered that Cleveland was a great example of a successful TOD with a BRT project because of the partnerships and buy-in from the community, agencies and political decision-makers.
 - Chief Development Officer at Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, Cassandra Borchers, added the SunRunner BRT is considered a fixed guideway with red lane treatments to designate them as bus lanes that allow for turning movements, creating a sense of permanence equivalent to a rail line. She said that we anticipate we will have successful TOD as part of this project.

Draft Multimodal Priorities

Chelsea Favero presented proposed changes to the multimodal priorities list. Projects on this list are recommended to FDOT for future state and federal funding. Since the last update of this list in 2020, four projects were allocated funding for implementation and are being moved from the 'Unfunded' section of the list. Staff is also proposing to add several projects, including one complete streets construction project, two projects from the Active Transportation Plan and the three projects that applied for funding through the Multimodal Priority List Call for Projects. The Multimodal Priority List is not yet final and will be brought back to the board for final action in May.

- Mr. Blanton added that this list is contingent on the Florida Legislative Session, but said we are hopeful the Legislature will work with the Department of Transportation to keep the adopted Work Program intact, allowing for funding for the I-275 segment as well as the Westshore Interchange as previously programmed. In addition, he mentioned that the Waterborne Transportation Committee voted to recommend the Clearwater Ferry Water Taxi Capital Program be added to the priority list and that will be brought back for discussion in May.
 - Mayor Kennedy expressed her excitement about the Clearwater Ferry Water Taxi Capital Program and some of the grants the Waterborne Transportation Committee will be seeking.
 - Mayor Bujalski asked why staff was waiting until the May meeting to add the program to the Priority List.
 - Mr. Blanton explained that he would like to have more concrete details, such as specific costs and the amount of the local match and its sources before the board discusses the recommendation. He committed to putting this on the agenda for the May meeting.
- Commissioner Seel asked what improvement is proposed at the intersection of Alt. U.S. 19/Bayshore and Causeway Blvd in Dunedin.
 - Mr. Blanton answered that there are three alternatives identified from the 2018 corridor study that would provide better mobility for traffic and enhanced safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. FDOT will be evaluating the feasibility of those alternatives as part of the design phase prior to construction.
- Commissioner Seel also inquired about the status of the Duke Energy Trail Overpass at State Road 60. She also asked why we were adding overpass projects to the priority list before completing other priority projects first.
 - Ms. Favero answered that staff has been working with Pinellas County & FDOT to do a feasibility alignment study for the Duke Energy Trail Overpass in the coming months. She noted that because this and several other projects are progressing, now is a good time to get other multimodal projects lined up in the queue. In addition, there may be

an opportunity for multimodal projects to get stimulus or infrastructure grant funding this year.

- Commissioner Seel also expressed that she would like to see an overpass where the Duke Energy Trail crosses State Road 580 because of the amount of traffic.
 - Mr. Blanton answered that currently this intersection is set to open with a controlled signal but that we could add the overpass in the future.
- Commissioner Eggers echoed Commissioner Seel's concerns for the need for an overpass at the intersections of Alt. U.S. 19 and Bayshore as well as where the Duke Energy Trail crosses State Road 580. He thinks there will be a lot of safety and traffic issues at these locations if we don't provide an overpass, also noting the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners made both these locations a priority.
- Mayor Bujalski inquired about the status of the recommended projects that were identified in the Alt. U.S. 19 corridor study from FDOT and why we weren't using these recommendations for our priority list.
 - Mr. Blanton answered that the recommendations for the 30-mile corridor were finalized in 2018 and can be found on the FDOT website. The first step in assessing the findings is to ensure local support and find opportunities for funding. In addition, the quickest way to make the needed improvements is to add specific projects to the priority list rather than trying to fund all the projects for the entire corridor.
 - FDOT Design Project Manager Justin Hall agreed with Mr. Blanton's statements, noting this was such a large corridor project, there was no path forward to fund over \$90 million worth of projects recommended in the study results. So, FDOT worked with local governments to prioritize these recommendations. Mr. Hall stated that his team will continue to work with Forward Pinellas to define what projects are next in line so they can see projects completed quickly.
- Mayor Bujalski further inquired if there's a way to note the recommendations in the study on the priority list to ensure this effort is not forgotten.
- Commissioner Long spoke in support of Mayor Bujalski's request to make a note of previous studies to consider as we look at the priority lists. She also expressed concern to find quicker funding solutions that can keep up with a rapidly changing world.
- Commissioner Seel also agrees with Mayor Bujalski and Commission Long and would like to see staff add a separate category to the priority list identifying recommendations of all the studies we complete so we don't forget about the work we've done in the future.
 - Mr. Blanton committed to collaborating with FDOT and staff to address these concerns.

Public Comment:

- Indian Shores Mayor Patrick Soranno, along with City of Indian Rocks Beach Mayor Kennedy and Councilmember Bill Smith, requested the Forward Pinellas Board place the current sidewalk projects in Indian Shores and Indian Rocks Beach at a higher priority on the Multimodal Priority List. Mayor Soranno stated that the project has been planned since 1997. He also stated that FDOT is planning on beginning a Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study in June

2021 to build consensus on the next steps for these projects and the existing ponding at this site is being addressed with a current FDOT project. However, He, Mayor Kennedy and Councilmember Smith are concerned for the safety of the residents in this area.

- Commissioner Seel noted that several solutions to this project had been proposed but never came to fruition at a local level due to the design and its cost. She agreed that this area needs to be fixed and stated after the PD&E study, the board should identify the best solution for this area.
- Mr. Blanton stated that some projects have been on the priority list since the 1990s because they require a large amount of funding. He expressed that by breaking down these larger projects, as staff has tried to do, we are able to fund projects and get them completed quicker. He agreed that this area was dangerous and committed to do everything he could to get something funded, if supported by the town, once they have recommendations from the PD&E study.
- FDOT Director of Transportation Development Richard Moss agreed that this is a safety issue that needs to be improved. He explained that they've been working on this area for almost five years and will begin a feasibility and PD&E study in July. Over the next year,,FDOT will reach out to the public for their input and then provide recommendations to the Mayor and work with Forward Pinellas to get the next phase funded. Mr. Moss agrees with Mr. Blanton that they may see more success by working with the community and breaking up the project into smaller phases.
- Vice Mayor Merz expressed his concern for the safety of this area as well as the resilience. He asked if this project was a part of a larger study.
 - Mr. Blanton stated that staff originally identified this corridor as a priority corridor in [Resilient Tampa Bay: Transportation](#), and we may have an opportunity with federal funding to make this corridor more sustainable over time. He stated that Forward Pinellas will continue to work with FDOT on this corridor.

Downtown St. Pete Mobility Study Updates

Sarah Caper provided updates on the Downtown St. Petersburg Mobility Study, including public outreach efforts. She said we are now in the process of developing and analyzing two possible scenarios to assess what happens if we make changes in roadway design, operations, and access, along with other transportation projects. Once those scenarios have been analyzed, we're going to do additional public outreach to see what the community thinks about these possible projects and scenarios. Their feedback will inform the final scenario and guide the development of the Action Plan which will recommend short and longer-term projects to meet the mobility, access and safety needs of this dynamic area.

- Commissioner Seel stated that she was in favor of one-way streets.
- Chair Rice stated that she preferred two-way streets because she feels it impacts retail and would increase small business patronage.

Other Items

- PSTA is launching a Bus on Shoulder Pilot Project beginning in June, and has begun a detailed analysis of the second phase of the waterborne transportation analysis. They will launch the next phase of the autonomous vehicle demonstration program in the City of Dunedin starting in May. They have approved a contract for Transportation Disadvantaged as well as the Jolley Trolley.
- Justin Hall presented updates on the status of Ulmerton Road, previously requested by Vice Mayor Merz. FDOT reviewed the completed PD&E from this intersection and determined there were no further improvements that could be made to improve merging safety issues until completion of the Gateway Expressway project. He also noted that once the Gateway Expressway opens in 2022 the traffic at Ulmerton Road will improve due to trips diverting to the new route. Mr. Hall committed to conducting further analysis to determine if there are still concerns once the Gateway Expressway opens.
 - Vice Mayor Merz expressed his continued concern that the significant safety issues when drivers are merging on Ulmerton Road have occurred for years even as it has grown.
 - Councilmember Gabbard supported Vice Mayor Merz' concern for this area and is thankful FDOT will continue to assess this issue. In addition, she stated concern with changes to the 34th Street South complete street project and expressed support for Whit Blanton's letter asking that changes made to the community are discussed with the board and staff moving forward.
 - Mr. Hall confirmed that he would commit in writing to clearer communication concerning changes to projects.
- The Gateway Partnership Meeting was held on March 26th and discussed performance measures and evaluation criteria for the Gateway Area.
- The Waterborne Transportation Committee met on April 2nd. They recommended that the board add the Clearwater Ferry Water Taxi Capital Program to the priority list and heard an analysis about considerations for waterborne PSTA bus operations.
- TBARTA selected a consultant for the Aerial Gondola and will begin the feasibility study by June, focusing on Downtown Clearwater to Clearwater Beach as well as Downtown St. Petersburg. Forward Pinellas will be on the study management team.
- The 34th Street South resurfacing project will be the first Business Access and Transit (BAT) lanes applied on a state road in Pinellas County. FDOT will evaluate the efficiency of the BAT lanes as the project moves forward.
- Forward Pinellas staff is preparing for public outreach to understand the needs and concerns of residents and businesses on U.S. 19 in preparation for the Forward Pinellas board workshop in the fall where the board will review and discuss alternative innovative intersections.
- The Legislative Committee has recommended written letters of opposition for the Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons Bill as well as the Building Design Bill. In addition, the committee would

like to meet after the Legislative Session to discuss more proactive approaches of working with the Legislature on Pinellas County priority issues.

- Over 1000 people registered for the Bike Your Own City event during Florida Bike Month.
- **Forward Pinellas was named the [2020 FDOT Planning Organization of the Year](#).**

Action Sheet

April 14, 2021

At its April meeting, the Forward Pinellas Board took the following official actions:

- **Consent Agenda** (vote: 11-0)
Approved to include the following:
 - A. Approval of Minutes of the March 10, 2021 Meeting
 - B. Approval of Committee Appointments
 - C. Approval of Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Revision
 - D. Acceptance of Quarter Two Financial Report
- **Board Workshop Follow Up on SPOTlight Emphasis Areas**
Following an overview of the proposed new SPOTlight emphasis area by the executive director, the board approved adding “Innovations for Target Employment and Jobs Access” as a new emphasis area for the agency’s focus in 2021-22. (vote: 11-0)