



## **Board Meeting Summary & Action Sheet**

**April 12, 2023**

*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**

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The Forward Pinellas Board held this public meeting in person on April 12, 2023, at 1 p.m. in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building.

#### **The board unanimously adopted Joint Resolution No. 23-25, designating Forward Pinellas as the forum to guide the implementation of the Advantage Pinellas Housing Action Plan.**

In February 2022, Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas, and the cities of Clearwater, Largo, Pinellas Park and St. Petersburg launched a new partnership aimed at increasing the affordability of housing in the county. The partners have committed to developing a common set of policies and resources to make it easier to create both traditional affordable housing and diverse market-rate housing that is affordable to households with a range of incomes. A “Tactical Team” of staff from the four initial partner municipalities and the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council has assisted Pinellas County and Forward Pinellas staff with drafting a Housing Action Plan to begin implementation of the compact. Since the Forward Pinellas board already coordinates land use and transportation planning among all 25 local governments, it is the best entity to serve as the ongoing forum for coordination and communication of the implementation activities of the Action Plan.

The Housing Action Plan will be presented at the Housing Summit on April 28, 2023, at the Largo Cultural Center from 9:00 – 3:30.

#### **Forward Pinellas staff updated the board on the proposed Countywide Rules Amendments – Target Employment and Industrial Land Study (TEILS) Update.**

Jared Austin introduced this item by providing an overview of the Countywide Plan and its intended purpose. He then discussed the recent Target Employment and Industrial Land Study (TEILS). He outlined the existing policies and incentives and identified proposed changes related to the TEILS update. Proposed amendments will increase regulatory flexibility, establish new incentives and create Target Employment Center (TEC) subcategories. Mr. Austin also outlined changes to the tiered amendment process for the TECs. A TEILS Advisory Group comprised of local government planners and economic development professionals is being considered and if created will further guide the implementation process and tackle any issues that may arise. The board will take action on this item in coming months.

## **Forward Pinellas staff updated the board on the Draft Transportation Priorities.**

Chelsea Favero reviewed the current list of Transportation Priorities, noting that one of the most important roles at Forward Pinellas is to advance transportation projects for state and federal funding.

**1) The Multimodal Priority List** includes roadway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects. More than 10 projects are being advanced into the Work Program and therefore are removed from the unfunded portion of the list. Staff is proposing to add five new projects, including three from local government applicants, one from the Complete Streets Grant Program and one to complete sidewalk gaps on the state roadway network.

**2) The Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program Priority List** is limited to smaller projects that address bicycle and pedestrian travel. Two projects are being advanced into the Work Program and five projects are proposed to be added based on local government funding applications.

Staff will continue to refine the lists and bring them back for action in July. Additional questions were taken and appropriately answered.

- Councilmember Driscoll inquired if the I-175 PD&E study could be moved up on the priority list as this project could have an impact on the many redevelopment projects happening within the Historic Gas Plant District that borders I-175.
- Commissioner Eggers inquired about what kind of work is being done to make passageways safer for biking. Ms. Favero explained that the bike lane projects included on the TA list will have some sort of physical barrier separating the cyclists from the traffic. Regarding questions during public comment on the cycle track under construction on Tierra Verde, Brian Hunter with FDOT shared that typically, these are separated two-way bike facilities. FDOT will come back to a future meeting with more information on the details surrounding the Tierra Verde cycle track.
- Councilmember Floyd stated that he wanted to advocate for one of the projects on the TA unfunded list: the Grand Central District Crossings in the City of St. Petersburg. There has been a high volume of pedestrians in the area and more than one fatality in the last year.

## **Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) staff presented an update on the SunRunner Project.**

Whitney Fox and Abhishek Dayal with PSTA shared a presentation with the board on how the SunRunner service is performing, including its ridership characteristics, safety record and other relevant details. Since October 2022, PSTA has been operating the SunRunner Bus Rapid Transit service. The SunRunner connects downtown St. Petersburg to St. Pete Beach, via South Pasadena, traveling in dedicated bus and turn-only lanes along 6.5 miles of the 10-mile route. This service is the first of its kind in the Tampa Bay region with 30 uniquely branded station platforms, and after nearly six months in operation, has been providing tens of thousands of rides each week. Questions were taken and appropriately answered.

- Councilmember Muhammad inquired as to the traffic impact in surrounding areas as people try to maneuver to keep from having to go down Central Avenue. Mr. Dayal shared that there is currently no data on this impact, but they hope to acquire some with the help of Forward Pinellas.
- Commissioner Scott inquired if there has been any conversation with the St. Petersburg Police Department regarding traffic enforcement with vehicles that have been using the bus lane that should not be. PSTA noted that they have engaged with the St. Petersburg Police Department and the Sheriff's Office to educate the public on how to use the BAT lanes, but there has been a lot of compliance. Commissioner Scott also inquired as to what sort of experience has PSTA had with damage to SunRunner buses regarding crashes. There were some incidents where SunRunner buses were hit, but currently all buses are in operation.
- Whit Blanton added that Forward Pinellas is working with PSTA on a Transit Oriented Development plan for the corridor. Phase I has been completed and Phase II is underway to amend St. Petersburg's comprehensive plan to enable more intensity and incentivize more walkability around stations, and we are looking now at applying that first phase analysis and research into two specific station plans along the SunRunner corridor west of downtown.
- Councilor Burke inquired as to whether PSTA will consider any park-and-ride locations. PSTA has recently updated the interactive map on their website showing where parking is available near the 30 stations if people want to park-and-ride.

## **Forward Pinellas staff shared more information on the Draft Memorandum of Understanding for a Regional MPO.**

Whit Blanton shared information on the Transportation Management Area (TMA) Leadership Group meeting that took place on March 24, 2023, which consists of representatives from Pinellas County, Pasco, and Hillsborough MPOs. A draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was presented, outlining some of the expectations that would be required if the group forms a regional MPO. The differences between the MPOs were acknowledged, along with the desire to maintain a linkage to land use, if a merger moves forward. There is a sense of urgency in some elected as well as non-elected officials, who feel the region can explore and move forward with a merger quickly. However,

this is not the case. The MPO process is highly scrutinized and very transparent. There is a lot of review and certification by state and federal agencies. In order to be able to receive federal money and to have federal funding flow to our urbanized areas, the MPOs must make sure the proper documents are in place that have been endorsed or adopted by the board and meet the federal and state statutory requirements before any regional MPO is certified. The estimated time for this to take place is three to four years.

**The board unanimously approved sending a letter of support to the Pinellas Legislative Delegation for two bills as recommended by the School Transportation Safety Committee (STSC).**

Whit Blanton shared information regarding two pieces of legislation moving through the Senate. Senate Bill 588 deals with speed enforcement in school zones. The other, Senate Bill 766, would provide for enforcement of school bus passing infractions and the ability of schools to opt-in, using today's technology, to provide another means for enforcement. It was requested of the board to send a letter of support to the Pinellas Legislative Delegation from the STSC supporting these two pieces of legislation.

**SPOTlight Updates**

- Executive Director Whit Blanton provided updates on
  - The Waterborne Transportation Committee met on March 15, 2023, at 1:00 pm in the Palm Room. Since that meeting, staff has been meeting with PSTA and will be meeting with the County. The County provided a list of questions regarding their potential contribution. A meeting will be set up once we address the questions. PSTA is submitting a Service Development grant application in this next cycle which would allow them to receive 50% funding from the state for the first three years of operations for the restart plan for the water taxi service by Clearwater Ferry, which will allow us to measure its effectiveness.

**Other Items**

- PSTA Report
  - PSTA received a request from multiple USF students, one of whom was a disabled veteran, to implement a pilot program for free bus passes for veterans. Staff have been evaluating this and will present a recommendation at the upcoming Planning Committee.
  - Ron Pierce with RSA Consulting gave an update on the Florida Legislature's bill regarding HART. He noted that the bill no longer includes language about a merger with PSTA, but there is a possibility of another Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being required for collaboration like in the past.

- Brad Miller provided a summary of the legislative trip to Washington D.C. he took with Commissioners Saracki and Robinson earlier in March where they discussed funding for public transportation with various legislators.
- Regional Activities Report
  - The Notice to Proceed for the Regional Transportation Needs Assessment has just been given and will be conducted through the Sun Coast Transportation Planning Alliance (SCTPA). This Regional Needs Assessment will be the foundation for the development of the county-based Long Range Transportation Plans and should be completed later this year. In addition, the SCTPA is working together to establish shared regional performance measures that are required by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for the performance of the regional transportation network.
- Legislative Committee Update
  - Senate Bill 102 – Housing, has been signed into law. The bill undermines some of the government controls on zoning, height, and density, but it also provides more funding for affordable housing. If a development meets the criteria of 40% affordable housing on a project in a commercial or industrial area it must be approved. It can also match the height or density of anything within a mile of that jurisdiction.
  - House Bill 1397 and Senate Bill 1532 - Regional Transportation Planning, directs the Florida Department of Transportation to evaluate the operating efficiencies and further a regional approach to transit within the Hillsborough County Regional Transit Authority (HART). FDOT would be required complete that evaluation by the end of this year.
  - House Bill 155 and Senate Bill 198 - The Tampa Bay Regional Transit Authority sunset legislation is moving forward and may pass this year.
  - An amendment to Senate Bill 1250, by Senator DiCeglie addresses financing for FDOT projects, but also includes a requirement of the MPOs of Hillsborough, Pasco, and Pinellas County to explore consolidation and provide a feasibility report on the benefits, costs and process of consolidation by the end of the year. If that bill passes, the MOU would be a big part of that.
  - The House and Senate budget is working its way through to a floor vote. It is not consistent with the Governor's proposed budget in all regards. One issue not consistent is in the Moving Florida Forward Plan. The Governor proposed \$7 billion for transportation congestion relief projects and the only project in the Tampa Bay area is I-275 from the Howard Frankland Bridge south to 38<sup>th</sup> Avenue N., adding the two managed toll lanes that are a part of the Howard Frankland Bridge.

The House and Senate budgets are much lower and would likely result in no funding for I-275.

- The June 2023 meeting has been canceled due to Pinellas County scheduling conflicts.

- Citizen Comments:

David Geddis Jr. addressed the board sharing he stands against affordable housing.

Sharon Calvert addressed the board sharing a request for a copy of the project description and information related to the 34<sup>th</sup> Street S and Bayway South project. She opposes the current lane elimination project for 34<sup>th</sup> Street S and had questions about a bike facility under construction in Tierra Verde.

Angela Taylor Sweet addressed the board regarding Safe Policing for Safe Communities.

Commissioner Mike Eisner, Tarpon Springs City Commission, addressed the board regarding Tarpon Springs having its own seat on the Forward Pinellas Board.

Commissioner Koulias, Tarpon Springs City Commission, submitted a letter read by a member of staff at the board meeting regarding Tarpon Springs having its own seat on the Forward Pinellas Board.

# Draft Action Sheet

April 12, 2023

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

- **Consent Agenda** (vote: 10-0)  
Approved to include the following:
  - A. Approval of Minutes of the March 8, 2023, Meeting
  - B. Approval of Committee Appointments
  - C. Acceptance of Quarter One Financial Report
  - D. Approval of Cancellation of the June Forward Pinellas Board Meeting
  
- **Advantage Pinellas Housing Action Plan Resolution**  
Following an introduction and explanation of the item by Whit Blanton, Forward Pinellas Executive Director, the board adopted a joint resolution designating Forward Pinellas as the forum to guide the implementation of the Advantage Pinellas Housing Action Plan. (vote: 10-0)
  
- **Forward Pinellas Legislative Committee Update**  
As part of the Legislative Committee update the executive director sought board approval to send a letter to the Pinellas Legislative Delegation regarding the state transportation budget and keeping the I275 project fully funded. The board authorized the letter. (vote: 10-0)
  
- **School Transportation Safety Committee Recommendation**  
Following an introduction and explanation by the executive director, the board authorized the drafted letter to be distributed to the Pinellas Legislative Delegation in support of SB 588 and SB 766. (vote: 10-0)
  
- **Draft Forward Pinellas Apportionment Plan**  
After an inquiry by Commissioner Smith to assess the board's interest in reevaluating the Draft Apportionment Plan, the board requested staff bring the item back for further consideration by the board at a future meeting. (vote: 9-1; Councilmember Floyd dissenting)