



**LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
MEETING AGENDA**

April 12, 2023 – 11:00 a.m.

333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater
The Palm Room

THE PLANNING COUNCIL AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION FOR PINELLAS COUNTY

1. **CALL TO ORDER**
2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 11, 2023**
3. **SCHOOL SAFETY BILLS**
4. **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION BILLS**
5. **LIVE LOCAL ACT**
6. **ADJOURNMENT**

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Appeals: Certain public meetings result in actions taken by the public board, commission or agency that may be appealed; in such case persons are advised that, if they decide to appeal any decision made at a public meeting/hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings, and, for such purposes, they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

Legislative Committee – April 12, 2023



2. Approval of Minutes from January 11, 2023

SUMMARY

The minutes from the previous Legislative Committee meeting are attached for the committee's review and approval.

ATTACHMENT(S): Minutes of the January 11, 2023 Legislative Committee Meeting

ACTION: Committee to review and approve the meeting minutes.

**FORWARD PINELLAS
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY
JANUARY 11, 2023**

Committee Members in Attendance:

Vice Mayor Patti Reed, City of Pinellas Park, Committee Chair
Councilmember David Allbritton, City of Clearwater, Forward Pinellas Treasurer
Commissioner Dave Eggers, Pinellas County
Commissioner Janet Long, Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas Chair (non-voting attendee for this meeting until appointment confirmed by the full board)

Also Present:

Whit Blanton, Executive Director
Linda Fisher, Principal Planner
Tina Jablon, Executive Administrative Secretary

The Forward Pinellas Legislative Committee met in the Palm Room at the Pinellas County Communications Building; 333 Chestnut Street, Clearwater.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Vice Mayor Reed called the meeting to order at 11:02 a.m.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 9, 2022

A motion was made by Councilmember Allbritton and seconded by Commissioner Eggers, and carried unanimously, to approve the minutes from the November 2022 meeting. (vote: 3-0; Commissioner Long non-voting attendee)

3. FOLLOW-UP TO FLORIDA POLITICS ESSAY ON PEDESTRIAN UNDERPASSES

Whit Blanton updated the committee on a recent article in the Times where Senator Hooper walked back his erroneous claims that previously appeared in his Florida Politics editorial. In follow up to the senator's claims that the underpass would increase criminal activity in the area, Forward Pinellas staff spoke to the Sheriff's Office and Pinellas County staff and were advised there is no evidence of such at other similar underpasses. He further advised that emails have been received from citizens advising they would use the underpass once built.

Councilmember Allbritton stated that he followed up with the City of Clearwater regarding concerns expressed by the local business owners relating to signage. He found that signage for the businesses impacted by the underpass construction would likely not need to be modified. Commissioner Eggers pointed out that this is largely because the underpass will only raise the roadway 10 feet, which is less than originally perceived by the business owners.

Mr. Blanton stated that Councilmember Beckman, City of Clearwater, advised that there is also a group of citizens in the Countryside neighborhood off Northside Drive that is opposed to the overpass construction there.

4. BILLS OF INTEREST

Linda Fisher alerted the group that bills have begun to be filed.

SB 64: Department of Transportation

Whit Blanton summarized the proposed bill, which would impose a cap on transit expenditures from the State Transportation Trust Fund to no more than 20% of annual expenditures. He reminded the committee members that the Trust Fund is mostly funded through fuel taxes and document stamp fees, and covers all transportation modes. There are no other caps for other modes. He advised that the state spends money on public transit only where there is a local match and that Miami-Dade and Broward are poised to meet those criteria and could receive a large share of state funds as a result. He expressed concern that this could impede other communities from receiving funding.

Mr. Blanton stated that Senator Hooper has previously said that the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) requested this bill. However, Mr. Blanton has been advised by FDOT staff that it was actually drafted by asphalt manufacturing and roadbuilding lobbyists. Mr. Blanton expressed his desire for metropolitan planning organizations to determine whether a cap is appropriate. He asked the committee to authorize him to engage with Senator Hooper and suggested drafting a letter to do so.

There was some extemporaneous discussions about electric vehicles and alternative methods of taxation to address decreases in gas tax revenues.

Whit returned the discussion to SB 64 and asked for a recommendation to send a letter.

Commissioner Eggers requested clarification about the concern regarding the bill. He emphasized his support for ensuring roads and crumbling infrastructure is adequately funded for repair and maintenance.

Whit reiterated that the bill creates an artificial cap on one form of transportation (transit), and there will be unintended consequences to such limitations.

Councilmember Allbritton made a motion to write a letter outlining concerns and encouraging more discussion, but not expressly opposing the bill. Commissioner Eggers seconded the motion and it carried by unanimous vote. (3-0; Commissioner Long non-voting attendee)

HB 41: Land Development Initiative and Referendum Process

Linda Fisher outlined the details of the bill, explaining that it would preempt any local government from requiring a referendum to amend its land development regulations, and would invalidate any such referenda held after June 1, 2011. She further advised that while this type of referendum requirement is rare, within Pinellas County, it would impact the Town of Redington Beach. There is currently no Senate companion bill.

Proposed Mixed-Use Housing Bill (no number yet)

Ms. Fisher explained that this draft bill contains provisions attributed to Senator Passidomo, incoming Senate President, that have been circulated for review by the Florida League of Cities. The bill would build upon the preemption provisions of HB

1339 from 2020 and SB 962 from 2022, but this time focus on commercial rather than industrial land. The bill has not yet been filed. Ms. Fisher cautioned that the bill, if passed, could significantly increase densities and building heights. She outlined the details of the major provisions of the bill as follows:

- A mixed-used housing development would be allowed on any commercially zoned property if 20% of the units are set aside as affordable, with a commitment of 30 years.
- The development would be entitled to highest residential density allowed in the local government's jurisdiction, with a maximum height equal to the tallest building located within one mile of the development or three stories, whichever is higher.
- If the statutory requirements are met, the local government would be required to administratively approve the development, without a public hearing.
- Those provisions would preempt any other state, county, or city limitations currently in place, including city charter limitations.
- In addition to the development-specific requirements, the draft bill would require all cities and counties to adopt density bonus regulations for affordable housing if not currently in place.

Commissioner Eggers expressed concern that while the Legislature is all for affordable housing in theory, it is not being backed up with funding.

Whit Blanton stated there have been concerns expressed around the state about the ability for local governments to preserve community character if the bill is passed.

HB 155: Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA)

Ms. Fisher stated that a new bill has been proposed to abolish TBARTA, which was expected. However, it also abolishes the Chairs Coordinating Committee (CCC.) While originally associated with TBARTA, it has grown into its own entity, the Sun Coast Transportation Planning Agency (SCTPA.)

Whit Blanton suggested enlightening the sponsor, Representative Holcomb, who represents Pasco/Hernando, of the potential unintended consequences that could result, specifically the impacts to the SCTPA.

5. DRAFT BILL LANGUAGE FOR VIRTUAL MEETING PARTICIPATION

Linda Fisher reminded the committee that it had previously made allowances for virtual meeting participation a priority for potential changes to current state law. However, the idea has not gained traction elsewhere. Ms. Fisher advised she took the liberty to draft proposed bill language. She asked the committee for permission to shop for a bill sponsor.

In response to query by Commissioner Eggers about allowing advisory committees to meet 100% virtually, Whit advised that lower quorum thresholds have already been implemented to ensure the ability to continue conducting business.

Commissioner Eggers emphasized the benefits of in person meetings. After which, there was discussion about quorum thresholds, committee membership bias resulting from in person requirements, the recent decline in committee membership since returning to in person meetings post pandemic, citizen participation and equipment provisions. It was suggested that some of the meetings remain in person throughout the year even if virtual meetings are permitted.

Ultimately, the committee gave permission to look for a sponsor for the draft bill.

6. STATE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Referring to the agenda packet, Linda Fisher alerted the members that a listing was provided of the state legislative committees and corresponding membership. Information was also provided about changes to the House committee structure that were made this year. The committee members praised the usefulness and thoroughness of the documents.

7. OTHER ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

Mr. Blanton suggested the committee forego its scheduled February meeting to avoid some scheduling conflicts with other meetings occurring that day, including a Forward Pinellas Board orientation. The members agreed to cancel the February meeting. Staff will provide any important updates via e-mail, and discuss at the board meeting if needed.

Mr. Blanton alerted the committee members that conversations are ongoing about the possibility of forming a regional metropolitan planning organization. This was followed by extensive discussion about the process, timing, potential regional board composition, pros and cons of doing so, the importance of maintaining a local voice, and what would happen to the Pinellas Planning Council.

8. ADJOURNMENT

There being no additional items for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 11:59 a.m.

3. School Safety Bills

SUMMARY

[Senate Bill \(SB\) 588](#), filed by Senator Rodriguez, and [House Bill \(HB\) 657](#), filed by Representative Koster, would allow local governments to enforce speed limits in school zone through speed detection systems. Similar, unsuccessful legislation has been proposed in previous years. The Senate bill has cleared two committees and is awaiting scheduling by the Fiscal Policy committee. The House bill has also cleared two committees and is awaiting scheduling by the Infrastructure Strategies committee.

[SB 766](#), filed by Senator Burgess, and [HB 741](#), filed by Representative Michael, would allow school districts to install and operate cameras on school buses to identify drivers who illegally pass school buses when stop-arms are deployed. Buses would be required to display prominent signage stating that camera enforcement was in effect, and the school district would be required to hold a 30-day awareness campaign prior to initiating the program. The Senate bill has cleared one committee and is awaiting scheduling by the Appropriations Committee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development. The House bill has cleared two committees and is awaiting scheduling by the Infrastructure Strategies committee.

ATTACHMENT(S): Draft Letter from Forward Pinellas Board to Pinellas County Legislative Delegation in Support of School Safety Legislation

ACTION: None required; informational item only.



April 12, 2023

Pinellas Legislative Delegation
Representative Linda Chaney, Delegation Chair
200 House Office Building
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Dear Chair Chaney and Pinellas Legislative Delegates:

This letter is to express support for SB 588 and SB 766, legislation intended to improve school transportation safety in our communities. As the metropolitan planning organization for Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas believes that ensuring the safety of our students while they travel to and from school is of utmost importance.

Each day, approximately two people are killed or severely injured on our roadways in Pinellas County, and some of those individuals are children attempting to access their schools and bus stops. This is a disturbing reality that we must make every effort to remedy. We need to take proactive measures to ensure the safety of our children and make transportation in our communities safer.

The proposed school transportation safety legislation is an important step in this direction. SB 588 will allow School Districts the option to install automatic speed enforcement equipment in designated school zones, where thousands of children are present on any given day, while SB 766 will permit the photographic enforcement of vehicles that pass stopped school buses, an occurrence all too common on our roadways.

Since 2021, the Forward Pinellas Board, Pinellas County and 23 of our 24 municipal jurisdictions, have adopted the Safe Streets Pinellas Resolution. This Resolution commits us all to advocate for, and advance, strategies that will improve the safety of our transportation network. These Senate bills align with the mission of our agency and with the policy direction set by our governing board, while providing another tool for our implementing agencies to utilize to ensure the safe travel of students.

While these two pieces of legislation will not solve all our school transportation challenges, they will assist us all in making the trip to school as safe as possible for our students, whether they arrive in a bus, car, bicycle or by walking.

As our elected representatives, we urge you to support this important legislation and do everything in your power to ensure its passage. We owe it to our children to provide them with the safest possible means of transportation to and from school, and these pieces of legislation are a critical part of that effort.

Thank you for your tireless efforts in Tallahassee to represent your constituents and for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Janet Long, Pinellas County Commissioner
Forward Pinellas Chair

CC: Pinellas Legislative Delegates
School Transportation Safety Committee Members

4. Regional Transportation Bills

SUMMARY

[House Bill \(HB\) 1397](#), filed by Representative McClure, and [Senate Bill \(SB\) 1532](#), filed by Senator Burgess, direct the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to explore whether the dissolution of the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART) would create “operational efficiencies” and “further a regional approach to transit.” The initial version of the bills directed FDOT to study whether HART should be merged with the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA), but all mentions of PSTA have been dropped from the current bills.

[HB 155](#), filed by Holcomb and Beltran, and [SB 198](#), filed by Senator DiCeglie, dissolve the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA) and provide for the agency’s assets to be distributed to the member entities in proportion to their contribution. The House bill has passed a House floor vote, and has been received by the Senate and referred to the Appropriations Committee, where it has not yet been scheduled. The Senate bill has passed two committees and has also been referred to the Appropriations Committee, but has not yet been scheduled.

ATTACHMENT(S): “PSTA steers clear of regional drama.” St. Pete Catalyst, March 30, 2022.

ACTION: None required; informational item only.



PSTA steers clear of regional drama

Published on March 30, 2023

Legislation to study merging – and dissolving – Hillsborough and Pinellas County’s transit agencies no longer mention the latter organization after undergoing committee amendments.

State officials have recently ordered the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA) [to shutter](#) and approved an initiative to [merge CareerSource Tampa Bay and Pinellas](#). The Hillsborough Area Regional Transit’s (HART) board suspended CEO Adelee Le Grand Monday after hearing the results of an independent investigation into alleged mismanagement.

Meanwhile, the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) and its CEO, Brad Miller, have managed to avoid the regional turmoil. Ron Pierce, the organization’s legislative consultant, provided confident messaging to board members Wednesday.

“Let me be very clear on this,” began Pierce. “Tallahassee has said very positive things from an operation standpoint and about what PSTA has done. That’s why they took PSTA out of the it at its first committee stop.

“This is more about HART, and only about HART, and not about PSTA.”

When the session began in early March, State Sen. Danny Burgess, R-Zephyrhills, and Rep. Lawrence McClure, R-Plant City, filed companion bills that would require the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to study combining PSTA and Hart. The legislation’s goal was to discern if a merger would increase efficiency, reduce costs and bolster “regional transit service and connectivity in the Tampa Bay area.”

Senate and House committees amended the bills to exclude any mention of PSTA or a merger. If passed, the legislation would still require the FDOT to study the “transfer of governance” of HART’s operations without mentioning what organization would assume those responsibilities.

FDOT officials would have until the end of the year to report the study’s finding to lawmakers and the governor.

“I’ve talked to both the House and Senate – I don’t think their intent, ultimately, is to repeal HART,” Pierce said. “Again, it’s just a study at this point.”

He said the amended bills have one committee remaining before heading for a vote. Pierce also relayed that several lawmakers expressed support for some operational changes that could involve PSTA.

Both bills state that rapid population growth underscores the “critical” need for regional transportation planning to create “safe and efficient management, operation and development of public transit systems.” TBARTA failed to achieve that goal, HART has management issues and PSTA is the only organization that fits the description.

The jewel in the local agency’s crown is the SunRunner, Tampa Bay’s [first bus rapid transit line](#). Its 10.3-mile route connects St. Petersburg with St. Pete Beach, and city and county officials frequently discuss expansion.

The project opened \$5 million under budget in October, and nearly 95,000 riders utilized the service in March.

Pierce noted that the two transit agencies have previously held memorandums of understanding (MOU) “on a few things,” and that is “something that could come back up” in a whirlwind legislative session.

In addition, he said a potential regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is gaining momentum in Tallahassee this year. Pinellas, Pasco and Hillsborough County officials currently operate local MPOs, which oversee transportation initiatives and serve as intermediaries for state and federally-funded projects.

A merger between the three counties could create the largest MPO in the state. While Pierce explained that is still a “concept” rather than legislation, he does believe stakeholders will “see some language at some point.”

“I’m not saying they’re going to say something that makes a merger happen immediately,” he added. “But I can tell you there’s been a lot of discussion of some key delegation members from the region.”

Pierce reiterated that the HART bills do not relate to PSTA or the MPO talks but said he would “closely monitor” proposals for any changes.

In an emailed statement, Miller said his focus remains on PSTA and ensuring the area has a “robust transit system that best serves our community.”

“I, and I know my PSTA board members, are always ready and willing to talk with anyone who wants to discuss improving regional transit services,” Miller continued. “Whether that’s in Pinellas County, the Tampa Bay region or beyond.”

In other legislative news, Pierce relayed that the Senate has appropriated \$750,000 of a \$1.5 million funding request for electric vehicle charging infrastructure. He said the organization is “in good shape” to receive the budgetary request, and Miller will join him in the state capitol next week.

Board Chair and St. Petersburg City Councilmember Gina Driscoll said she would also make the trip.

5. Live Local Act

SUMMARY

[Senate Bill 102](#), filed by Senator Calatayud, was signed into law by Governor DeSantis on March 29. Known as the “Live Local Act,” it’s an omnibus housing law that directs new funding to various existing affordable housing programs, creates a tax credit program for corporations to donate to affordable housing, deletes statutes enabling rent control, and preempts local regulation of density and height for some affordable housing developments.

In a similar vein to HB 1339 (2020) and SB 962 (2022), this law preempts local zoning regulation for residential and mixed-use developments on land designated for industrial, commercial, or mixed-use land if at least 40% of the units are affordable for at least 30 years. However, unlike the previous legislation, these provisions are not optional for the local government. For qualifying developments:

- Density may not be restricted below the maximum permitted standard within the jurisdiction.
- Building heights may not be restricted below the tallest permitted building height within one mile, or three stories, whichever is greater.
- The local government may not require a zoning or land use change, special exception, conditional use approval, variance, or comprehensive plan amendment for height and density.
- The development must be administratively approved if requirements for multifamily developments other than height or density are satisfied.

While the law provides for either residential mixed-use or entirely residential developments to be subject to this process, there is a clause that if less than 20% of a community is designated for commercial and industrial use, only mixed-use developments are eligible. Such developments must be a minimum of 65% residential. Pinellas County as a whole has only about 18% of its land designated for commercial or industrial use, although this may vary among local jurisdictions.

ATTACHMENT(S): None.

ACTION: None required; informational item only.