



**WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE  
MEETING AGENDA**

**December 18, 2020 – 1:00 p.m.**

Florida Botanical Gardens; Magnolia Room  
12520 Ulmerton Rd, Largo, FL 33774

**THE PLANNING COUNCIL AND METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION FOR PINELLAS COUNTY**

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1. **CALL TO ORDER** (1:00 PM)
2. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** (1:05 PM)
3. **COMMITTEE KEY OBJECTIVES AND CRITERIA** (1:30 PM)
4. **PSTA PERSPECTIVES ON SYSTEMWIDE INTEGRATION** (1:45 PM)
5. **DISCUSSION** (2:15 PM)
6. **NEXT STEPS/NEXT MEETING** (2:55 PM)
7. **ADJOURNMENT** (3:00 PM)

**ATTACHMENT: OCTOBER 9TH MEETING SUMMARY**

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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.*

**FORWARD PINELLAS  
WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE  
MEETING SUMMARY  
OCTOBER 9, 2020**

Subcommittee Members in Attendance:

Mayor Cookie Kennedy, City of Indian Rocks Beach, Forward Pinellas Treasurer  
Commissioner Janet Long, Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas Secretary  
Vice Mayor David Allbritton, City of Clearwater  
Mayor Julie Ward Bujalski, City of Dunedin  
Councilmember Brandi Gabbard, City of St. Petersburg  
Vice Mayor Suzy Sofer, City of Belleair Bluffs

Also Present:

Whit Blanton, Executive Director, Forward Pinellas  
Christina Mendoza, Principal Planner, Forward Pinellas  
Tina Jablon, Executive Administrative Secretary, Forward Pinellas  
Amy Elmore, Communications & Outreach Program Manager, Forward Pinellas  
Chelsea Hardy, County Attorney's Office

Other Interested Parties In Attendance:

Brad Miller, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA)  
Brian Pessaro, Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA)  
Chris Leffert, Florida Department Of Transportation, District 7 (FDOT)  
Trisha & Dennis Rodriguez, Clearwater Ferry Services  
Tara Hubbard, Tampa Bay Ferry/Hubbard's Marina  
Ed Chesney, City of Clearwater  
James Halios, City of Clearwater  
Lauren Matzke, City of Clearwater  
Lanie Sheets, City of Dunedin  
Cheryl Stacks, City of St. Petersburg  
Linda Portal, City of Madeira Beach  
Jamie Viveiros, City of Treasure Island

The Forward Pinellas Waterborne Transportation Subcommittee met in the Magnolia Room at the Florida Botanical Gardens; 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 1:11p.m. by Executive Director Whit Blanton.

2. ORGANIZATION OF SUBCOMMITTEE

Whit Blanton expressed enthusiasm for the formation of the first ad hoc subcommittee under the Forward Pinellas Board to tackle a topic of interest. He then provided an overview of the subcommittee's charge and purpose, stating that the goal of the subcommittee is to determine how to best support the sustained success and expansion of the waterborne transportation system in Pinellas County.

The members of the subcommittee were tasked with selecting a chair and vice-chair to lead the meetings. Vice Mayor Suzy Sofer nominated Mayor Cookie Kennedy to serve as the chair, which was seconded by Mayor Bujalski, and unanimously approved by the members (vote: 6-0). Councilmember Gabbard nominated Vice

Mayor Allbritton to serve as the vice-chair, which was seconded by Vice Mayor Sofer, and approved unanimously (vote: 6-0).

### 3. STATE OF THE WATERBORNE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Christina Mendoza gave an overview of the existing waterborne transportation system in operation in Pinellas County. She outlined the funding mechanisms and operating agreements for the existing services. She conveyed information about routes, fares, ridership and revenues for the existing services provided by the Cross Bay Ferry and Clearwater Ferry. She shared additional information about potential future routes under consideration by the operators and local governments.

In response to a query by Commissioner Long regarding the decreased annual ridership, Trisha Rodriguez of the Clearwater Ferry explained that a lack of adequate funding was the primary reason for the decrease. The lack of funding has led to a reduction in hours of operation for the service.

Brad Miller of PSTA expressed his enthusiasm for the beginning of this subcommittee's work. He stated that Pinellas County needs more than just a bus service, it needs a mobility network. He outlined some options to be considered to bring in needed funding. He is eager to see a coordinated effort to fund and expand waterborne transportation in the region. He stressed the importance of integrated planning to the successful expansion of services.

Commissioner Long encouraged the group to think in new and innovative ways. She highlighted the significance of this work to future generations and to the resiliency and sustainability of our area. She reminded the group that by creating new and creative transit options the carbon footprint left behind could be greatly reduced.

Whit Blanton explained the purpose of the subcommittee is to build consensus around proposals and funding options that can be brought to the full board for consideration and pursued in a unified manner.

### 4. DISCUSSION

Chris Leffert, FDOT, explained for the benefit of the group, the process by which state funding could be acquired. He stated that the amount of available funds may not be a large sum, but that FDOT D7 feels it is a service that could be a model for other communities and is worth looking into pursuing.

The subcommittee members expressed excitement for the potential of this group to usher forward needed change that has been a long time coming.

Cheryl Stacks, St. Petersburg, offered information regarding the success of the Cross Bay Ferry. Specifically, she explained that the \$1.4M subsidy required from the local government partners for the inaugural season has now been reduced to \$750,000 annually under the new three-year contract for seasonal service. She said this was in large part because the ferry operator was now willing to assume more of the risk after demonstrated ridership and revenues. There is also now a lower threshold for revenue sharing to begin, that once met, a portion of revenues will be distributed back to the local government partners.

Ed Chesney, City of Clearwater, suggested that the Public Private Partnerships have room for improvement. For example, he believes funding for improved infrastructure (i.e., ferry landing enhancements) is needed because the current infrastructure is lacking. He stressed the importance of consistent and dependable hours of operation to increase ridership. Reliability and predictability are imperative to success.

James Halios, City of Clearwater, inquired about the contracting structure, wondering if it would be similar to that of the Jolley Trolley. He said he believes it is incredibly important to have clearly defined roles, responsibilities and defined ownership of vessels.

Whit Blanton explained that models and examples would be brought back to the group for reference during the development of any proposals.

It was discussed that riding the ferry is also an experience that can increase tourism, especially for the beaches. Trisha Rodriguez agreed and stated that riders want options and are eager to have them.

Brian Pessaro, TBARTA, reminded the group that operating funds are always the bigger challenge. He stressed the importance of pursuing flexibility for the spending of transit dollars with the state.

In response to query by Whit Blanton, the subcommittee members outlined what they believed needed to be brought back to future meetings for them to be successful and productive.

Mayor Bujalski – It is important to get visitors out of cars and using a transit service. She suggested a pass/card that could be used for all transit providers in the county. She also stressed the importance of consistent pricing and strategic locations. Eventually, she would like for one entity to manage the entire system to ensure continuity and countywide consistency as service expands.

Vice Mayor Allbritton – Getting waterborne transportation to the mainstream is coming because it is already becoming a buzzword. He believes getting the route times down and more consistent will be valuable. Integration with the various transit options will also be important.

## 5. NEXT STEPS/NEXT MEETING

Mayor Kennedy cautioned the subcommittee members that the work would not be light, the commitment would not be small and that much would be expected of them.

Vice Mayor Sofer expressed her desire to remain on the subcommittee as a small business representative even after her tenure on the Forward Pinellas Board concluded. After which, Whit Blanton advised this would be explored with the attorney and confirm.

Mayor Kennedy recognized that the City of Dunedin is already an example that can be looked at as a case study. She asked that Mayor Bujalski bring back to the group an outline of what they are currently doing in Dunedin with pros and cons regarding

what is working and what isn't. She asked that this information be emailed in advance of the next meeting.

Mayor Kennedy encouraged the group that the legislators at the state and federal level are aware of and open to discussing this topic, specifically Congressman Charlie Crist. She also encouraged the group to reach out to Forward Pinellas staff in advance of the next meeting with any thoughts or ideas.

The group will reconvene before the end of the year. At that meeting, PSTA will present an approach for a system plan as a basis for a funding request in advance of a federal Notice of Funding Availability expected to occur in January or February 2021.

6. ADJOURNMENT

There being no additional items for discussion, the meeting adjourned at 2:41 p.m.