At the end of 2015, I wrote my Chair’s Message about the newly unified Pinellas Planning Council and Metropolitan Planning Organization. We were preparing to further unite the agency under a new name, and I looked forward to what we could accomplish as land use and transportation planning continued to align.

I write this message at the end of 2016 encouraged by what Forward Pinellas has been able to accomplish and excited for the year ahead. Two years into the process of creating this organization, hiring a new director, and changing policies and procedures to better fit our shifting needs, we are forging ahead. Forward Pinellas is creating transportation solutions that connect people and places, planning for land use in ways that create opportunities and enhance communities, and using our local dollars efficiently to incentivize and attract more return on our state and federal money.

Over the past year, we’ve made progress toward our goals and seen return on the investments we have already made. Look to the Gandy Corridor in St. Petersburg to see the tangible results: Forward Pinellas prioritized an interchange that would remove the last traffic light on Gandy Boulevard at Brighton Bay Boulevard, and FDOT recently announced that the beginning phase of the project is funded in its five-year work program. At this point, we can even envision a future where motorists can go from the Skyway to I-4 without taking the Howard Frankland or hitting a traffic light. Look also to the Complete Streets program, which will fund efforts to make roads around Pinellas County accommodating to all modes of transportation, or the Forward Pinellas-led efforts to unify the speed limit on Gulf Boulevard.

Another example of the unique opportunity for Forward Pinellas to coordinate countywide planning efforts is our SPOTlight (Strategic Planning and Operations Topics) areas, which include enhancing beach community access, the U.S. Highway 19 corridor, and the Gateway/Mid-County Area. At its last meeting of the year, the Forward Pinellas Board approved the scope for a master plan study of the Gateway/Mid-County area, pursuing opportunities for connecting the Gateway with local roads and increasing opportunities for living, working, and playing all in the same area. This master plan will be made possible through coordination between Pinellas County, Largo, St. Petersburg, Pinellas Park, and the Florida Department of Transportation - a coordination made easier by the new Forward Pinellas organization and mission.

Speaking of coordination between areas, regional cooperation for a stronger Tampa Bay continued to be a topic of conversation in 2016, as Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Pasco county residents continue to live and work not in county silos but across one greater Tampa Bay region. While speaking with one voice and having a consistent message can only help us, as a county and a region, we will keep in mind that the land use/transportation connection that we have built and worked so hard
to create in Pinellas County should not be lost in any conversations about regional transportation and connections. We also need to keep our focus on the local issues near and dear to our residents while we work for solutions to the overarching regional issues that affect us all as a three-county Transportation Management Area.

The past two years as chairman of the Forward Pinellas Board have been some of the most rewarding in my career as a public official. I offer my congratulations to the new Forward Pinellas chairman, County Commissioner John Morroni, and look forward to continuing to serve as a board member in 2017. Thank you to my fellow Forward Pinellas Board members and to the staff who made the accomplishments of the past few years possible. I know we will all continue to work together to move Pinellas forward as a county where we can prioritize the needs of our communities and move forward with the connections between them for the good of every resident.

Sincerely,

Jim Kennedy
Forward Pinellas Chairman, 2015-2016

Forward Pinellas 2015-2016 Board, from left to right: Karen Williams Seel, Dave Eggers, Julie Bujalski, Joanne “Cookie” Kennedy, Michael Smith, Tom Shelly, Jim Kennedy, Executive Director Whit Blanton, Doreen Caudell, John Tornga, Cliff Merz, Darden Rice, John Morroni (not pictured: Sandra Bradbury)
Planning for Whole Communities

With the connection of land use and transportation planning under the Forward Pinellas umbrella, the vision of planning for entire, whole communities - without roads and development in silos - became more possible than ever before. That unification allowed planners to think strategically about how we could align land use and transportation goals to improve our neighborhoods.

**Multimodal Approach**

One step in that process was beginning to focus on a “multimodal” approach - an approach that incorporates all forms of transportation, whether residents drive, take public transit, walk, or bike. While that idea starts with transportation, communities that make multimodal accommodations often also see a growing mix of residential, business, and public activities and land uses.

With those factors in mind, the board approved Forward Pinellas’s first multimodal transportation priority list in September, which along with traditional road projects included constructing sidewalks on Starkey Road, trail connections and improvements, a pedestrian overpass on Harn Boulevard, and waterborne transportation. That message of a multimodal approach to transportation paid off, with FDOT funding several of those projects in its five-year work program and two of the trail projects through its SUN Trail program.

The multimodal mindset extends to Forward Pinellas’s own budget, as well. Forward Pinellas’s new Complete Streets incentive program is designed to help local governments develop more walkable and vibrant communities. Complete Streets are designed, operated and maintained for all users, regardless of age or ability, based on the context of the roadway and its surrounding area. Such street transformations also help spur economic opportunity, demonstrating how quality street design for accessibility creates memorable places of value to the community.

**Complete Streets**

Through collaboration with its committees and board, Forward Pinellas developed an incentive program to assist local governments in planning, designing and constructing Complete Streets projects. Applications were due in December, and staff is evaluating those projects to determine which ones will be recommended for funding in the new year. The West Bay Drive corridor concept plan was funded earlier in the year as a pilot project for the Complete Streets Program.

Forward Pinellas will continue to focus on its mission of aligning resources with a shared vision for the county, using its funding to help enhance local communities. Complete streets and a multimodal vision are essential in making sure all our residents can get safely from place to place, regardless of how they choose to get there. The agency’s nine advisory committees, including the Citizens Advisory Committee, Technical Coordinating Committee, Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and Planners Advisory Committee, are essential to creating that shared

Downtown Dunedin (photo credit Visit St. Petersburg Clearwater)
Pinellas County’s many communities, from small towns to big cities, provide lifestyle options for everyone. As we continue to grow and evolve, Forward Pinellas will help ensure that we preserve and enhance the high quality of life we enjoy.

Countywide Plan

In August 2016, we marked our first year since adopting the updated Countywide Plan, which coordinates land use among all 25 local governments in Pinellas County. The new plan works to protect established neighborhoods while channeling new residents and jobs into centers, corridors and districts where there is sufficient transportation and other infrastructure. These centers, corridors and districts are designed for convenient walking, biking, and transit use, and have a mix of land uses such as housing, offices, shops, and restaurants, creating places of special value to their communities. The plan also works to protect important countywide resources such as environmentally sensitive land, scenic views, and land needed for high-wage employers.

The new plan has been updated to work more efficiently within a redevelopment environment, reducing the number of Countywide Plan Map amendments that local governments need to request, and simplifying the process. This year the Board approved 28 amendments, 20 percent fewer than would have been required under the old plan. In addition, more than half of those amendments qualified for the more streamlined subthreshold review process.

Local Assistance

In addition to our role in coordinating the Countywide Plan, Forward Pinellas offers technical assistance to local governments in planning for their communities. In 2016, Forward Pinellas staff assisted 15 local governments with updating their local comprehensive plans, grant writing, mapping, evaluating proposed developments, and other planning efforts - more than 70 projects in total. In partnership with local government staff representatives on our Planners Advisory Committee, we identified and studied common topics of concern, such as short-term housing rentals, hotel densities, and rules that govern transfers of development rights between parcels.

PICH Grant

This year, one project that worked to create great places arose from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Partnerships to Improve Community Health” grant program, which provided funds for improvements to parks and trails that support walking and biking. This was a collaborative effort involving the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County, Pinellas County Public Works, and the Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources Department. The projects resulting from this grant in September 2016 were wayfinding signage to improve access to parks in minority and low-income communities, bike repair stations for riders on the Pinellas Trail, and automated trail counters to record the number of bicyclists and pedestrians on the trail.
As Pinellas County continues to redevelop in ways that serve our changing population, Forward Pinellas is looking at all the tools we have to connect our region - from connecting the cities and places within Pinellas County to connecting our neighboring counties.

**SR 60 Implementation Strategies Study**

One project focusing on new tools for connecting people and places is the State Road 60 implementation strategies study that launched at the end of 2016, looking at the corridor linking Clearwater Beach, Downtown Clearwater, and Tampa International Airport. Forward Pinellas is partnering with the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, City of Clearwater, Pinellas County, and FDOT to implement Complete Streets options in the corridor. The study area also includes Tampa International Airport as a critical regional hub for the planned PSTA SR 60 Express Bus Route, which will provide a regional transit connection for residents and a transit option for tourists coming from the airport to Clearwater Beach. Forward Pinellas also continued to advance the Pinellas Trail Loop as a way to enhance transportation opportunities around the county. The efforts to gain funding for the trail met with unprecedented success to the tune of $7.1 million from the state alone. In the first year of the SUNTrail program, an FDOT program to promote the design and construction of shared-use trails, the program designated $5.7 million for construction to close a gap in the Duke Energy Trail between Chesnut Park and Enterprise Road, a key part of completing the Pinellas Trail Loop around the county. The department also designated another $1.4 million for pre-construction work on a project to create a bike and pedestrian overpass on the Courtney Campbell Causeway at Gulf-to-Bay Boulevard and Bayshore Boulevard. Under the leadership of the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA), eight counties in the Tampa Bay region and their transportation organizations have collaborated to identify regional priority projects, which include regional multi-use trails.

The trail near where the overpass is planned for the Courtney Campbell Causeway at Bayshore Boulevard
As a result of this coordination, more than $8 million was awarded to trails in Citrus, Hernando, Pinellas, and Polk counties.

**Waterborne Transportation**

Forward Pinellas also furthered efforts to expand waterborne transportation as an option within the county and region. “Waterborne Transportation Priority Projects” was included on the 2016/17 Multimodal Priority List adopted by the board. This included ferry projects on the intracoastal waterways in Pinellas County, as well as the new Cross-Bay service between St. Petersburg and Tampa. Forward Pinellas staff organized a Waterborne Transportation Technical Forum in November, where Pinellas ferry operators and local government staff spoke about the rules and processes surrounding creating or running a waterborne service.

Now, Forward Pinellas staff is working with local governments in the county to develop a model ordinance, clarifying the procedures and making them consistent to make it easier to initiate and operate a waterborne service.

**Regional Conversation**

Through its partnership with the Hillsborough County and Pasco County MPOs to form the Transportation Management Area Leadership Group as a regional transportation forum, Forward Pinellas participated in the scoping and consultant selection for the Tampa Bay Premium Transit Feasibility Study. The 18-month study is led by Hillsborough Area Regional Transit (HART) to identify, evaluate and establish priorities for regional inter-county transit designed to meet the growing demand for travel across county lines for work, education, medical needs and entertainment. In addition, the TMA Leadership Group recommended each MPO adopt a single list of regional transportation priorities, which Forward Pinellas and the other MPOs did in September 2016, reflecting our continuing coordination efforts.
Within Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas identified three planning areas as essential to the land use and transportation future of our region. Those SPOTlight (Strategic Planning and Operations Topics) areas are beach access, the Gateway/Mid-County area and the U.S. 19 corridor. Within the past year, Forward Pinellas has made strides in each of those areas.

**Enhancing Beach Access**

Enhancing beach access was a focus for much of the year, including a listening session and Forward Pinellas supporting and supervising projects that made it easier and safer to get to the county’s beaches. The State Road 60 project is working to ensure tourists and residents alike can easily get from Tampa International Airport or anywhere else in Pinellas County all the way to the beach, whatever mode of transportation they use. Waterborne transportation projects looked outside the transportation box, with the Clearwater Ferry transporting 22,000 riders in April alone and the Madeira Beach Ferry launching in October.

**Gateway/Mid-County Area**

After the focus on beach access, the Gateway/Mid-County area is our SPOTlight focus ending 2016 and headed into the coming year. In May, a community listening session provided some ideas for what should be included in the study scope for the master plan for this area, which is one of the economic engines of Pinellas County. The board approved that scope at the end of 2016. The master plan will look to develop a
complementary transportation network that takes pressure off the state highway system. It will also identify an intermodal center to complement the Tampa Bay Premium Transit Study happening concurrently. In keeping with Forward Pinellas’s multimodal goals, the plan will develop strategies for increased access to trail facilities in region, create a balanced and diverse land use mix, and strengthen walkability and a sense of place. Forward Pinellas will work with FDOT along with the county and the three cities that make up the Gateway/Mid-County area to develop the Gateway/Mid-County Master Plan in the next 12-18 months.

**U.S. 19 Corridor**

In the U.S. 19 corridor, Forward Pinellas partnered with FDOT to fund an access to transit study that identified ways to improve the safety and access of pedestrians and bicyclists traveling to and from bus stops. The study area included the mid-county and northern sections of the corridor. It concluded in September.

Forward Pinellas also began working with the Pinellas County Planning Department on an economic/market analysis and land use study of the U.S. 19 corridor in the Palm Harbor area to examine the interconnectivity between economic value, land use, and transportation.

In 2017, we will continue to work with local governments, as well as PSTA and FDOT, to conduct similar studies and develop an operating concept for premium transit. We will also work to identify projects resulting from completed studies.

After the focus on beach access, the Gateway/Mid-County area is the agency’s SPOTlight focus ending 2016 and headed into the coming year (photo credit City of St. Petersburg)
To be involved in the community, people need to know who you are - and with a new Forward Pinellas name, introducing citizens to the new agency was the first order of business in 2016.

**New Website**

Along with the debut of a new name, Forward Pinellas released a new logo and website (forwardpinellas.org) as outreach tools for the agency. In addition, Forward Pinellas created and filled a new Communications & Outreach Program Manager position in August to help publicize the agency’s new mission of integrating land use and transportation planning while advancing the agency’s public involvement program.

Our staff created content for each page of the website, from crafting a mission statement for the new organization to explaining the documents and work products that Forward Pinellas produces. In addition, staff members including the executive director, planners and administrative staff continued to post on the blog about issues important to them and the community, such as bike share programs, safety on Gulf Boulevard, improving accessibility in the county, the importance of the millennial generation in planning, and many more. Forward Pinellas continued to grow our social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, speaking as a “likable authority” in the community and sharing information about our specific work and the wider planning landscape. The Forward Pinellas Facebook page gained 132 followers over the course of the year, an increase of 25 percent, and the Twitter page gained 148 followers, an increase of 60 percent.

**In The Community**

The organization increased visibility in the offline community as well, with staff attending community meetings and events and meeting with local leaders and state lawmakers. The executive director had one-on-ones with state legislators and community activists alike, and made presentations to city councils and commissions across the county. Forward Pinellas staff recorded attending more
than 130 meetings and events, including local chamber meetings, neighborhood associations, industry outreach events and conferences, and coordinating meetings with other transportation and land use organizations.

Volunteer Partners

But it’s not only staff members who carry the Forward Pinellas banner - Forward Pinellas also has interested and committed residents who volunteer their time with our organization and who represent us well in the community. To recognize just a few:

- Patti Johnson, a Pinellas Park councilwoman, was nominated by Forward Pinellas and named the elected official of the year by the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged. Councilwoman Johnson is a PSTA Board member and the chair of our Local Coordinating Board, which oversees the local Transportation Disadvantaged Program. In these positions and in her role as a professional guardian, she is a champion for disadvantaged citizens who don’t have easy access to transportation.
- Geraldine “Geri” Raja left the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee, of which she was vice chair, this year after seven years on the committee and many more spent passionately advocating for bicycle and pedestrian issues (and commuting from Tierra Verde for the meetings).
- Tammy Vrana, a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee and owner of a planning consulting firm, rounded up members of her Safety Harbor community to participate in a “What Planning Means to Me” Forward Pinellas social media campaign.

Thanks to the Forward Pinellas staff and the community members who help carry out our mission, the wider Pinellas County community is learning about the mission of Forward Pinellas and what we are doing to improve the future of our county and region. We look forward to furthering that mission in 2017.
February
- Approved major update of the Public Participation Plan
- Launched countywide Bike Share Feasibility Study

April
- Held listening sessions for US 19 Emphasis Area

May
- Held listening session for Enhancing Beach Community Access Emphasis Area
- Held listening session for Gateway/Mid-County Emphasis Area
- Finalized and released Forward Pinellas brand and logo

June
- Launched Forward Pinellas website, officially merging the PPC and MPO online presence

July
- Approved Complete Streets Program providing federal funding for local projects to improve roads for multi-modal transportation, with application process opening in October
- Funded West Bay Drive corridor as a pilot for the Complete Streets Program
- Held Forward Pinellas and PSTA joint work session

September
- Completed the Access to Transit Study, a Forward Pinellas/FDOT joint effort, identifying options to improve the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users on US 19
- Adopted first multimodal transportation priority list, putting bicycle, pedestrian and transit projects in line for funding traditionally reserved for highway construction
- PICH grant funds wayfinding signs, trail counters and bike repair stations

November
- Hosted a Waterborne Transportation Workshop to provide technical assistance to water taxi services, followed by starting development of a model countywide ordinance

December
- Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged announced Pinellas County Local Coordinating Board Chairman Patti Johnson as 2016 Elected Official of the Year
- Due date for Complete Streets Program applications for funding
As we begin 2017, we recognize the importance the new year brings in how we will continue to shape our integrated land use and transportation planning activities. Sustaining our economic growth and ensuring that it brings greater opportunities for all Pinellas County residents requires smart investments in transportation and wise land use decisions. Those decisions can give people real choices in how they travel, where they can choose to live, and how they interact with their neighbors and community.

We have a new Administration and Congress in Washington that are talking about a major national infrastructure investment and numerous other tax and policy reforms that may affect the way we advance and fund transportation projects. Closer to home, Pinellas County will again ask the public to support a new extension of the Penny for Pinellas program that funds capital projects, including a variety of transportation projects - from sidewalks to road resurfacing and bridges.

Within Tampa Bay, we will continue the process of defining how we truly strengthen our regional transportation planning process, starting with a collaborative workshop scheduled for May 12 at the St. Petersburg College EpiCenter. With the goal of establishing objectives and guiding principles for regional transportation decision-making, this workshop will formally kick off a research effort to examine national best practices and determine how they might apply to our unique geography and culture in West Central Florida.

We will also take the first steps to begin updating the Long Range Transportation Plan, with a horizon year of 2045. Along with the Countywide Plan, the LRTP is a foundational plan that sets the agenda for transportation strategies, projects and initiatives in Pinellas County and, in collaboration with our regional partners, for Tampa Bay. We are looking to develop a unified regional plan with a clear and compelling vision along with specific metrics for success and achieving our goals.

We will take steps to advance our VisionZero initiative to reduce fatalities and injuries, particularly for vulnerable road users like those on foot, bicycle or motorcycle. We will continue to work with our state, local and private partners to build upon the initial success of waterborne transportation in Pinellas County and Tampa Bay, developing a connected network of routes and supporting facilities that ensure effectiveness as a transportation option.

We will continue working closely with our local governments to provide support and guidance on a variety of projects that move us toward achieving our shared and community-based goals.

Those are just a few of the things on our plate heading into a busy 2017. I am excited about the direction and opportunities we have before us in Pinellas County, and look forward to working with our citizens, businesses and agency partners to link land use and transportation decisions for better economic and quality-of-life outcomes. I hope you will actively join us in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Whit Blanton, FAICP
Forward Pinellas Executive Director