Forward Pinellas Board, 2017

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Redington Shores

Inland Communities:
Belleair
Belleair Bluffs
Gulfport
Kenneth City
Seminole
South Pasadena

Photo on front cover: A Forward Pinellas walking audit in Safety Harbor. Projects like these provide local communities with valuable planning assistance.
A Letter from the Executive Director

As we move into 2018 at Forward Pinellas, we go back to our ABC’s. That’s **Adapt**, **Build**, and **Connect**, and it’s the framework for our land use and transportation decision-making process. Adapt means that we need to be flexible, planning for change in environment, technology and policy. More than just physical roads and buildings, build encompasses guiding planned growth and building trust and community through our plans and their outcomes. We also need to increase connectivity, whether that’s connecting the transportation network, connections between places, or supporting a greater sense of connectedness within our communities.

Since 2015, we have focused on three SPOTlight (Special Planning & Operations Topic) areas - Enhancing Beach Community Access, A Vision for U.S. 19, and A Master Plan for the Gateway/Mid-County Area. Those areas of focus will continue, and there is still more work to be done. However, other areas are arising that require our planning efforts as well, with health, resiliency and technology being just a few.

The work we do at Forward Pinellas matters to our communities, and hearing and considering their needs is a central part of our mission. Our residents care about the safety of our roads as well as their efficiency. They want affordable housing options and redevelopment that will boost the economy while fitting the character of their neighborhoods. They see the potential in solutions like autonomous vehicles and ridesharing, and look to us to ensure we ride the technology wave instead of being left behind by it.

Meanwhile, the conversation about regional transportation is entering into a crucial phase. The Tampa Bay Transportation Management Area Leadership Group, an advisory body in which we participate along with the Metropolitan Planning Organizations in Hillsborough and Pasco, is poised to steer the conversation about regional transit with a catalyst project that is competitive for federal and state funding. The resulting plan - the Regional Transit Feasibility Plan - is already a topic of public interest. Simultaneously, we are engaged in a study on best practices for regional transportation coordination that is sure to have wide-reaching impacts on the tri-county MPOs and how we operate and work together.

Our work is built upon effective collaboration with our partners at the state, regional and community level. It is our responsibility to be a leader in those conversations, and to ensure that the outcomes are in the best interest of Pinellas County residents as well as the region as a whole.

As we enter the initial phases of creating the 2045 Pinellas Transportation Plan, we consider all these issues - and how they will affect not only us, but our youth and generations to come.

Sincerely,

Whit Blanton, FAICP
Executive Director
In 2017, Forward Pinellas continued to work on projects and with partners to enhance safe, multimodal access to the county’s beaches. Waterborne transportation providers helped keep cars and congestion off of the beach roads. Improvements to crossings and bike lanes on Gulf Boulevard, implemented by the Florida Department of Transportation, make it safer for bicyclists and pedestrians to navigate the beaches. One of the agency’s major beach access projects was the State Road 60 Corridor Study, which began in 2016 and concluded this year with a number of recommended projects and strategies intended to close gaps in the transportation network. This included the Clearwater Beach to TIA Express, a new expedited transit service linking Clearwater Beach, Downtown Clearwater, and Tampa International Airport. In addition to specific transportation projects, the study also included recommendations for long-term strategies to improve safety in the corridor, including enhanced crosswalks, landscaping, and transit shelters.

A Complete Streets pilot project along West Bay Drive in Largo and Belleair Bluffs also concluded this year with recommendations to increase access and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. The community is still discussing the recommendations of that project; the final recommendations will be implemented with a planned road resurfacing by Pinellas County.

Image: Rendering of a possible transit bypass on SR 60
In 2017, Forward Pinellas worked to create a shared vision for the U.S. 19 corridor and to improve travel conditions for all users.

Forward Pinellas continues to work closely with the Florida Department of Transportation on the design of planned improvements to U.S. 19, including to advance construction of the interchanges at Republic/Curlew and Tampa/Nebraska roads, while also working on safe access points for bicyclists and pedestrians through underpasses and overpasses. In addition, Forward Pinellas is working with FDOT on the design of frontage roads in the northern section of U.S. 19 to make them safer and more supportive of adjacent land uses, including to support desired redevelopment in the City of Clearwater.

Two major studies of the corridor kicked off in 2017, evaluating the land use, economic and real estate conditions and trends of surrounding areas, one in the Largo area and one in the Tarpon Springs area. The study findings, which are expected by spring 2018, build upon prior work by the City of Clearwater and Pinellas County and will inform future transportation improvements and land use policy. Another study involves developing an express bus concept of operations for the U.S. 19 Corridor from Tarpon Springs to St. Petersburg. The study, which is scheduled to conclude by summer 2018, will define possible route options and stop locations for new or enhanced express service as well as identify a preferred express route for the corridor.

Also in the works is a study of the potential elimination of outside through lanes on 34th Street in south St. Petersburg to consider whether the road can be redesigned with Complete Streets improvements to accommodate bicyclists, transit users and vehicle traffic which would also support redevelopment tied to the Skyway Marina District. This project is expected to be completed in spring 2018.

Photo: Construction of U.S. 19 interchanges
Forward Pinellas saw the community come together in support of the Gateway/Mid-County Area Master Plan in the past year, with three local governments, Pinellas County and the Florida Department of Transportation signing on to partner with Forward Pinellas on the study. The plan, which will complement the work of the Regional Transit Feasibility plan, has funding from all local governments in a 30 square mile study area, and the local funds are being matched by the Florida Department of Transportation.

The funding agreement is still in process, but the project start date is scheduled for this spring. The plan will identify potential locations for an intermodal center, which is a hub connecting all modes of transportation. Another desired outcome is the development of a complementary land use and transportation network that relieves travel demand on the state highway system, boosting the economic impact of the area that is already the county’s business engine. The plan will also address infrastructure needs to make the flood-prone area more resilient.

Photo: Carillon Business Park in the Gateway Area (credit City of St. Petersburg)
In Forward Pinellas projects and community discussions, health/accessibility, technology and resiliency are topics that increasingly arise. With the Joe’s Creek Greenway Trail Alignment Study, Forward Pinellas received a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Partnerships to Improve Community Health (PICH) program to increase access to safe and healthy transportation options in the underserved Lealman community. The proposed Joe’s Creek Greenway Trail - which has been slated for possible Penny for Pinellas funding - would run for five miles east to west and connect Lealman and Kenneth City residents to the Pinellas Trail, public transportation service, area schools, shopping centers, and other destinations.

The Transportation Disadvantaged Program, which is overseen by the Forward Pinellas Local Coordinating Board, ensures that underserved populations have access to the transportation that they need. This year, the board adopted a new Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan for 2017-2022, which found that over one-third of the county - more than 370,000 people - is either disabled, elderly, or low-income.

*Image: A rendering of the proposed Joe’s Creek Greenway Trail*
In September, the Forward Pinellas Transportation Technology Forum brought together transportation planning agencies, local governments and transit agencies from both sides of Tampa Bay, as well as advocates of emerging transportation technologies. The forum provided a platform for information sharing, discussion and decision-making on these technologies, ranging from aerial transit to autonomous and connected vehicles. State Senator Jeff Brandes gave the opening remarks, and presentations and panels included a variety of experts and transportation providers. Forward Pinellas will be following up on the forum in spring 2018 and will be including plans for changes in technology in the 2045 Pinellas Transportation Plan.

Photo: Transportation Technology Forum at Ruth Eckerd Hall, September 28, 2017
The arrival of Hurricane Irma in September forced county residents, businesses and government agencies, including Forward Pinellas, to think about emergency response and resiliency. Forward Pinellas staff members put in 226 combined hours at the county’s Emergency Operations Center before, during and after the storm and dealing with recovery. Forward Pinellas is re-examining its emergency response role and how it can better link the mission of integrating land use and transportation with emergency operations. In addition, Forward Pinellas staff is working with Pinellas County on a countywide vulnerability assessment in 2018.

*Image: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration historical tracking*
Two ongoing themes for Forward Pinellas in 2017 - and into the future - are partnerships and regional transportation. Forward Pinellas worked with many partners in the past year to create a wider impact on the county and region. The agency worked closely with the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority, notably on prioritizing bus rapid transit in the Central Avenue Corridor in St. Petersburg. Forward Pinellas also increased coordination with the Florida Department of Transportation, including a peer exchange trip to St. Louis to understand parallels to local interstate modernization projects. In April, the agency partnered with Pinellas County Planning and Economic Development to host an Economic Leadership Symposium, looking at the county’s potential for redevelopment and how to increase its competitiveness. Forward Pinellas created a Partners in Action award to recognize partners who go above and beyond, with Clearwater receiving the inaugural award for creating U.S. 19 Zoning District & Development Standards in accordance with the Countywide Plan.

Forward Pinellas continues to work through the Tampa Bay Transportation Management Area Leadership Group on regional transportation issues. A study on best practices for regional transportation planning is underway and will be complete in late 2018. The group is also poised to bring a catalyst plan for a regional transit project to the public for input. In addition, the Tampa Bay Area Transit Authority has a new transit-focused mission thanks to the Florida Legislature, and Forward Pinellas is working with the agency on several regional projects to achieve that mission. Finally, Forward Pinellas is working alongside the Pasco and Hillsborough MPOs to develop a regional component of the upcoming 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan.

Photo: Inaugural Partners in Action award to the City of Clearwater
Two Forward Pinellas grants are funding local government projects around the county, enhancing walkability and sense of place.

The Complete Streets Grant Program encourages transportation investments intended to serve as catalysts for transformative redevelopment through the implementation of Complete Streets projects, which make streets accessible to all users. The program awarded its initial round of funds in 2017 to three projects. The first project, construction of a wide sidewalk on 34th Street South in the Skyway Marina District in St. Petersburg, was put into the Forward Pinellas Priority List for inclusion in the state work program. The other two projects were concept plans: a plan for Drew Street in Clearwater and a plan for 54th Avenue North in Lealman. Both were awarded $50,000. Forward Pinellas will award the next round of funding in March 2018.

The Planning and Placemaking Pilot Grant Program was conceived to assist local governments in their work to maintain and/or strengthen the character of the county’s many distinct communities. The program will award $50,000 total to local governments that are looking to stimulate change to their built environment. Forward Pinellas issued a call for applications in December and received four submissions. Funding will be awarded in March.

Photo: A section of Drew Street that will be addressed by the awarded Clearwater concept plan
Forward Pinellas began the Knowledge Exchange Series this past year to explore emerging planning topics, highlighting best practices and trends and examining their impact in the county’s communities and greater Tampa Bay region. The first Knowledge Exchange Series topic, “Microbreweries as Catalysts for Downtown Redevelopment” examined the ways that breweries boost the local economy and gave guidance for local governments. The second topic, “Finding the Missing Middle,” looked at the need for compact multi-unit, low-rise housing. The topic explored the growing appeal of these housing types, their history in Tampa Bay and the communities that are being built today.

*Photo: Hayes Park Village in Oldsmar, an example of a Missing Middle development*
Following on the heels of a board workshop early in the year, Forward Pinellas adopted a strategic plan - a broad outline of goals and initiatives to guide the agency's planning work over the next several years.

The adopted plan lays out seven goals:
1. We will enable safe travel for all users.
2. We will use data to tell stories about who we are as a county and what our future should be.
3. We will plan a future for Pinellas County as a whole.
4. We will grow purposefully as an agency.
5. We will engage the public to create a future that reflects its needs and desires.
6. We will work with Pinellas County’s communities to create plans that reflect their needs.
7. We will develop partnerships to strengthen our cities, county and region.

These goals will serve as guiding principles for Forward Pinellas’s plans and projects, using it as a basis for creating the new Long Range Transportation Plan, budgeting, the agency work program and policy development.

Photo: Courtney Campbell Causeway Trail
Chelsea Favero, AICP, was recently promoted to planning manager, supervising many of the transportation planning staff. Chelsea has worked in planning roles with Pinellas County for 13 years. She started as an intern with the county doing comprehensive planning work and later moved to the MPO to do long-range transportation planning. Formerly a principal planner, she coordinates the Technical Coordinating Committee and the Tampa Bay TMA Leadership Group. Heading into 2018, she is overseeing development of the 2045 Pinellas Transportation Plan as well as a performance-based, outcome-driven planning process.

Photo: Chelsea volunteering for Habitat for Humanity with other Forward Pinellas Staff during the county’s In-Service Day in February
Program Planner Alicia Parinello joined the American Institute of Certified Planners this year, taking a brand new test and passing on her first try. The AICP certification “is the only nationwide, independent verification of planners’ qualifications.” Alicia has been with the agency for more than five years, and has performed roles that have spanned both land use and transportation functions. Her current role includes land use and transportation planning, and she serves as a representative on the Pinellas County Employees’ Advisory Council. She is also the American Planning Association Suncoast Section Area Director for Pinellas County.

Photo: Alicia at a Planners Advisory Committee meeting
Anyone who has ever been to a Forward Pinellas meeting, called the office, or tried to schedule an appointment has benefited from the talents of the agency's administrative staff. Tina Jablon (right) and Maria Kelly (left) keep the Forward Pinellas world turning every day, whether it's pulling together staff updates for agendas or inspiring team spirit by dressing up for Halloween as pictured. They may only look like superheroes one day a year, but they perform that role the other 364.
Forward Pinellas is lucky to have many staff members who have made their careers here, as well as others who are beginning theirs.

Several staff members received service recognitions this past year (pictured from left to right): Planner Sandra Knoebel, 30 years; Principal Planner Linda Fisher, 20 years; Program Planner Alicia Parinello, five years; Planning Division Manager Rodney Chatman, three years; Principal Planner Sarah Caper, three years; and Accounting Services Coordinator Joann Jacobs, 30 years (not pictured).

Staff members remain the agency’s greatest resource. One of those staff members is longtime Transportation Division Manager Sarah Ward, who will retire in 2018 after more than 32 years of service. Sarah has been a fount of institutional knowledge and planning expertise, and Forward Pinellas has identified leaders within the organization to ensure that the agency can continue to fulfill its mission successfully after her departure.