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In the five years since the formation of Forward Pinellas as the countywide land use and transportation planning agency, 2019 stands out as a watershed year. It began with a transportation funding workshop involving about 120 people, almost half of them elected officials, to build consensus for meeting the county’s transportation needs equitably. It ended with a major update of the Countywide Plan tied to the adoption of Advantage Pinellas, our new long range transportation plan, and taking the first steps in a countywide housing strategy to meet Pinellas County’s needs today and in the future.

Stronger, more collaborative working relationships fully emerged in 2019 between Forward Pinellas and its partners: Pinellas County Government, the Florida Department of Transportation, Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority and the municipalities across the county. Honest, frequent communication and a commitment to helping each other achieve shared goals were crucial to these partnerships.

We continued to develop and enhance tools and technology to aid understanding and support decision-making, such as our interactive Transportation Improvement Program, Pinellas Trail usage counts, community story maps, and Crash Data Management System. Our Complete Streets, Planning & Placemaking and Transportation Alternatives grants provided local governments with financial resources to help advance their own project initiatives.

The next year promises to be even more significant. Our board and staff are focused on ensuring the plans and partnerships we have in place bring ideas to reality. We’re poised to make important decisions that benefit everyone. Let’s be wise and courageous in fulfilling our vision for Pinellas County and Tampa Bay.

Always moving forward,

Whit Blanton, FAICP
Forward Pinellas Executive Director
Plans and priorities are the major work products created at Forward Pinellas. Read more about the planning work this year that will determine how the county develops and moves for years to come.
The **Advantage Pinellas Plan** is Pinellas County’s new Long Range Transportation Plan, planning for transportation through 2045.

Forward Pinellas creates a new long range plan every five years, but this was the first long range plan since the merger of countywide land use and transportation planning into a single agency in 2014. With that context, staff worked to develop a plan that took a holistic view of Pinellas County’s transportation needs.

In two years of outreach for the plan (pictured below), Pinellas residents were consistent with their feedback. They understood that continuing to build more roads wouldn’t solve congestion and wanted to get the most out of the current transportation network. They wanted mobility options that serve the needs of all road users, including drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users, while maintaining existing infrastructure.

Based on that feedback, the Advantage Pinellas Plan is the first long range plan to dedicate close to 100% of flexible funding sources to projects that address safety, accessibility, transit and technology. To see the plan, visit forwardpinellas.org/advantagepinellas.

The **Advantage Pinellas Active Transportation Plan** is the new Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. It plans for a connected, comfortable, safe, and accessible network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities across Pinellas County.

Forward Pinellas created the Active Transportation Plan in coordination with the development of Advantage Pinellas and local government transportation plans as a key component of the long range planning process. To accommodate Pinellas County’s projected growth, Forward Pinellas is planning for more strategic investments in pedestrian and bicycle networks to serve a wide variety of trip purposes. The community has a clear interest in this approach: an interactive map requesting feedback on how to make Pinellas County’s bicycle-pedestrian network better received over 200 responses.

The Active Transportation Plan highlights best practices and includes a review of existing plans and conditions, a safety analysis, an evaluation of network gaps, analysis of the low-stress bicycle network, and performance measures, and a prioritized list of 10 strategic bicycle and pedestrian projects.
The **Transportation Improvement Program** lists projects throughout the county slated to receive state and federal funding over the next five years. While Forward Pinellas updates the TIP annually, a comprehensive interactive version had been in the works for years.

This year, thanks to the work of Program Planner Jared Austin, the Interactive TIP map went live. The map, shown below, displays the current phase of any project — from bicycle or pedestrian projects to road construction or signal timing — on county or state roads.

The map includes information such as the project start date, what stage the project is in, total project cost and more, viewable just by clicking on the project. Users can filter projects by six categories, visible as tabs on the map.

To check out the Interactive TIP for yourself, visit [forwardpinellas.org/projects/transportation-improvement-program/](http://forwardpinellas.org/projects/transportation-improvement-program/).

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For the first time since it was adopted in 2015, Forward Pinellas made a major **update to the Countywide Plan**. The goal of the updated plan is to create a network of high-density, walkable activity centers and multimodal corridors, laying the groundwork for an enhanced transit system and making Pinellas County more competitive for federal transit funding.

A new land use strategy map (above right) shows existing and potential locations for these activity centers and multimodal corridors. A revised framework for adopting and amending these designations creates incentives for local governments to create high quality transit-oriented development, by allowing streamlined countywide review of minor local changes in centers and corridors meeting urban design criteria.

Outside of the centers and corridors network, new density bonuses and a new medium density designation will encourage greater housing affordability and mixed-use development throughout the county. These allow more housing units to be built on less land, and are designed to encourage walking, biking and transit use, without detracting from the character of surrounding established neighborhoods.
Three SPOTlight (Strategic Planning & Operations Topics) emphasis areas have guided Forward Pinellas’s work and goal-setting since 2015. Here’s the progress made toward those areas this year.
A concept created in 2015, the Gateway Master Plan came to fruition in 2019. The result of a historic $1 million partnership between the Florida Department of Transportation, Forward Pinellas, and four local governments, the Master Plan effort launched in 2018, along with a project website: GatewayMasterPlan.org. The project management team issued its draft recommendations at the end of this year.

With multiple Fortune 500 companies and over 114,000 jobs in a wide range of industry sectors, the Gateway Mid-County area (see map below) is an economic hub of the region as well as Pinellas County. Despite its advantages, the Gateway Mid-County area is hindered by disconnected, auto-centric development patterns that lack identity and limit mobility options. The Gateway Master Plan is intended to identify opportunities for the development of more efficient and sustainable land use patterns in a 30 square mile multi-jurisdictional area, with resilience to flooding as a key concern.

The Master Plan aims to provide housing options that put people closer to their destinations, reduce congestion, enable investments in transit, and provide safe bicycle and pedestrian connections.

Strategies being considered in the Master Plan include the following:

- Additional transit options that can serve employees, residents, and visitors;
- Repurposing underused properties that can attract advanced manufacturing and other high-wage employers;
- Improving safety for those driving, walking or riding their bikes through the study area;
- Providing the infrastructure to improve water quality and resiliency to future sea level rise and coastal inundation;
- Identifying areas for more multifamily development; and
- Identifying opportunities for additional recreational and commercial amenities.

One key outcome of the Master Plan is the identification of a future regional intermodal center location to serve as a hub for regional and local transit. The plan also identifies four redevelopment focal points for vibrant mixed use and walkable districts; one rendering of what that might look like is shown above.
Forward Pinellas continued to develop a vision for U.S. 19, from south county to north county. Early in the year, Forward Pinellas worked with the City of St. Petersburg to unveil a plan for Complete Streets improvements on 34th Street South between 22nd Avenue South and 54th Avenue South. Plans include converting outside lanes to bus and turn-only lanes, crosswalks with flashing beacons, and wide sidewalks on both sides of the road. The project coincides with the Florida Department of Transportation’s planned resurfacing of the road in 2022.

In north county, FDOT studied alternative interchange designs for planned overpasses north of Nebraska Road. This process began after Forward Pinellas met with members of the community, who expressed concerns about the effect overpasses would have on surrounding neighborhoods and businesses. Forward Pinellas continued to support the overpasses at Republic/Curlew and Tampa/Nebraska as priority projects of immediate importance. FDOT is also conducting a study on retrofitting the U.S. 19 frontage roads to make them safer for all users of the road and allow easy access to and from surrounding neighborhoods.

With beaches that draw not only Pinellas County residents but visitors from all over the world, enhancing beach access remained a top priority in 2019.

In addition to the Indian Rocks Beach Gulf Boulevard visioning study, which is addressed in detail on page 20, Forward Pinellas worked with the Town of Indian Shores and the Florida Department of Transportation to find a solution to drainage and safety problems on Gulf Boulevard. Issues with the pavement drainage had caused water to pond in a shared use path for bicyclists and pedestrians, which was at-grade with the road. FDOT had already been working on building sidewalks with the drainage fixes, but where right-of-way was limited in Indian Shores had to explore creative options. The preferred option, which had an elevated sidewalk and bike path, was added to the Forward Pinellas priority list for funding.

Forward Pinellas also worked with the City of Dunedin to request improvements to the entrance and exit process from Honeymoon Island State Park, which has caused backups onto Curlew Road during peak season. The state parks division plans to fund two new entrance lanes to the park in 2021, and Forward Pinellas is working with other state and local partners to identify other strategies to improve traffic flow and safety to the popular park and the Dunedin Causeway.
The plans created by Forward Pinellas help determine the county's future reality. Here are a few ways this agency shaped the future — and present — this year.
In 2019, the transportation planning agencies of Tampa Bay focused on how to best achieve their regional goals. With the conclusion of the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority’s regional metropolitan planning organization best practices study at the end of 2018, the MPOs began to implement the low-hanging fruit of those recommendations almost immediately. Namely, this meant resuming management of the eight-county MPO Chairs Coordinating Committee, which had been a TBARTA-supervised committee, and incorporating the tri-county Tampa Bay Transportation Management Area Leadership Group (pictured above) as a subcommittee of the CCC. These changes give statutory weight to the TMA Leadership Group and allow MPO staff to take a more hands-on approach to regional coordination.

These efforts to speak with one voice paid off, literally: In October, Governor Ron DeSantis designated $1.4 billion for reconstruction of the I-275 Westshore Interchange, which the TMA Leadership Group had made its top regional priority for 2019. Construction will begin in 2023.

When Pinellas County, Forward Pinellas and Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority partnered in January to kick the year off with a joint transportation funding workshop (photo below), no one could have predicted that the year would close with a defined strategy for transportation funding as a catalyst for economic development (learn more on pages 27-28).

The workshop included presentations from each agency on current funding sources and shortfalls, interactive polling on how participants ranked transportation needs and how they thought gaps could be filled, and a panel discussion with elected officials and business leaders.

A consensus emerged: Pinellas County has transportation needs that require creative thinking about funding, and meeting those needs requires partnerships at every level: regionally, between cities, and with the business community. County administration, Forward Pinellas, and PSTA began discussions on what it might look like to fully meet those needs. The Board of County Commissioners is poised in early 2020 to decide how to address transportation funding challenges in the short- and long-term to better meet the county’s needs.
The Gulf Boulevard Visioning Project in Indian Rocks Beach shows what can happen when a highly involved community comes together to give their input on the redeveloping future of their city. The project examined current economic conditions and indicators, along with a previous 2009 special area plan for growth and development, to make recommendations about how the city should plan for Gulf Boulevard’s future.

Forward Pinellas and the city hosted three workshops (one pictured above), all with more than 50 people in attendance. The project management team identified four key themes of importance to residents: Economic Vitality, Community Character, Transportation and Mobility, and Quality of Life and Environmental Protection. Workshop participants crafted vision statements around these themes to reflect what they thought Indian Rocks Beach should strive toward. The final report, to be presented to the Indian Rocks Beach City Commission in February, will outline guiding principles the community will use to implement its vision.

Forward Pinellas helped local communities implement their great ideas with two continuing grant programs in 2019: the Complete Streets Grant Program and the Planning & Placemaking Grant Program.

For the past three years, the Complete Streets program has awarded $100,000 for concept planning and put a $1 million construction project on the upcoming year’s priority list. This year, both Clearwater and St. Petersburg received $50,000 each for concept plans: Clearwater for Fort Harrison Avenue, and St. Petersburg for 18th Avenue South. St. Petersburg’s construction project was also added to the priority list: Complete Streets improvements connecting three new parks on 22nd Street South. Later in the year, the Forward Pinellas Board and the Florida Department of Transportation identified funding to advance a concept plan from the program’s first year: improvements on Clearwater’s Drew Street (a rendering of the proposed design is below). That next phase is an FDOT corridor action plan, moving the concept closer to reality.

In its second year, the Planning & Placemaking program awarded cities with planning funds to encourage redevelopment: $50,000 to Largo for a Special Area Plan for U.S. 19 and Roosevelt Boulevard and $25,000 to Tarpon Springs to identify the best use for a city-owned distressed property.
Forward Pinellas couldn’t succeed without the people on its team. Learn more about some new additions and career public servants.
A banner year for staff additions and development, 2019 saw two additions to the Forward Pinellas team and one well-deserved promotion.

Christina Mendoza (pictured standing, above) joined Forward Pinellas in June as a principal planner, working on projects that integrate transportation and land use planning. She got off to a quick start, managing the Indian Rocks Beach Gulf Boulevard Visioning project and planning the Transit-Oriented Development Knowledge Exchange Series event in October.

Angela Ryan joined Forward Pinellas in December as an active transportation principal planner after a 12-year career with the Army Corps of Engineers. She will have a guiding role in shaping the agency’s growing active transportation and health equity focus.

Jared Austin, who joined the agency full-time in 2018 after an internship, was promoted from planner to program planner. He presents land use cases to the Forward Pinellas Board, manages the Transportation Improvement Program, and assists local governments with data visualization.

Forward Pinellas was sad to say goodbye to two long-tenured members of the team with their retirements in 2019: Transportation Planning Analyst Marc Hanger and Bicycle Pedestrian Planner Susan Miller.

Marc retired in January (photo below) after 28 years of service. He handled the traffic counts program, laying down counters on roadways throughout Pinellas County to identify changing traffic patterns and determine roadway level of service. Marc was also an involved member of the bicycling community and enjoyed exploring the county’s neighborhoods and trails on his bicycle. He plans to use his retirement to write a science fiction novel.

Susan retired at the end of December after 35 years of service. After 20 years managing the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee, she got her own bike to get out on two wheels, and staff gave her a gift card to a bike repair shop as her going-away gift. Her sense of humor and deep relationships with members of the bicycle/pedestrian community will be missed. She looks forward to spending time with her grandchildren.
Look at any survey done in Pinellas County or attend any government meeting, and a common message begins to emerge. Residents, elected officials, and government staff all speak with one voice: Pinellas County has transportation needs that are not being met.

Forward Pinellas, Pinellas County, and the Pinellas County Suncoast Transit Authority came together starting in 2019 to brainstorm what those needs were and how the gaps could be filled. They determined that the needs fell into three buckets: reduced road congestion, safer transportation corridors, and enhanced transit services, all of which intersected with other needs in Pinellas County (see graphic above).

Pinellas County and local governments worked together to identify a list of projects such as intersection improvements, stoplight timing, street lighting, and countywide trail crossings, where congestion and safety could be improved.

On the transit side, Forward Pinellas conducted an analysis to determine the locations most ready for enhanced transit service, based on population, employment/workforce development, redevelopment, and affordable & workforce housing factors. After looking at these combined data points, Forward Pinellas studied the best ways to connect areas with high propensity for transit.

These connections became priority corridors (see map below right) that are ripe for a return on future transit investment. Based on the data, three of the priority corridors — U.S. 19 South, Roosevelt Boulevard/East Bay Drive, and Alternate U.S. 19 South — were selected as the first three to receive limited stop, premium transit service, once funding is identified and available.

Combined, these three “buckets” of transportation needs yielded a clear strategy for economic development in Pinellas County through strategic transportation improvements. Forward Pinellas will continue to work closely with Pinellas County and PSTA in 2020 to determine how those investments can become a reality.
Building on major transit developments of recent years, Transit-Oriented Development is poised as a major topic for 2020 for multiple agencies.

Leading up to a transit-oriented development workshop Forward Pinellas hosted in October (pictured below), staff went on a field visit to Lake Mary, Florida, to learn about the development that the city is creating along the SunRail corridor. Lake Mary staff members and others shared their insights about how to create successful TOD in Pinellas communities. Going forward, Forward Pinellas will work with PSTA and local governments along the Central Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Corridor to implement a $1.2 million federal grant for TOD planning related to the project. The Central Avenue project is the first project in the Tampa Bay region to progress this far in the federal funding process.

With density-encouraging updates to the Countywide Plan, the Central Avenue BRT progressing through the federal funding process, and strong partnerships between local agencies and governments, Pinellas County is positioned to create successful transit corridors that direct development to places that can support it.

Affordable housing has risen in focus as a pressing issue for Pinellas County and all of Tampa Bay in recent years. Households are spending more of their budgets on simply having a roof over their heads. More than one third of households in Pinellas County are low-to-moderate income and cost-burdened, defined as spending more than 30% of gross income on housing.

In conjunction with local government and agency partners, Pinellas County and Forward Pinellas are working together to propose a countywide housing strategy. This strategy, called Advantage Pinellas Housing, will coordinate and amplify the individual local government and agency efforts occurring throughout the county. It will include both traditional affordable housing programs, as well as land use planning efforts to increase and diversify the supply of housing generally, and link these efforts with countywide planning for transit and economic development.

A kickoff meeting was held in December, and a housing summit is tentatively planned for this spring, which will bring together a broad range of public, private and non-profit stakeholders from throughout the entire county.