



CITY OF TARPON SPRINGS

**DOWNTOWN
SPECIAL AREA PLANS**

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP SUMMARY

FEBRUARY 2, 2010



RENAISSANCE PLANNING GROUP

THE EVENT

On January 19, 2010, the City of Tarpon Springs held a community stakeholder workshop in support of the Downtown (Community Redevelopment Area) Special Area Plan project. The workshop was conducted during a regularly scheduled session of the City's Planning Focus Group. It was attended widely by area residents, business owners, City officials and City staff. Renaissance Planning Group consultants conducted the workshop along with the assistance of staff from the City's Planning & Zoning Division of the Development Services Department. A total of 28 participants – including 10 Planning Focus Group members – were present at the workshop.

Workshop Intent

The intent of the workshop was to gather input from community stakeholders to identify the most important variables towards implementing a future vision for the Downtown area in Tarpon Springs. Participants were asked two key questions important to defining and implementing a future vision through the Special Area Plan process:

- What are the key ideas that define the future vision for the Downtown area?
- What strategies would help implement this vision?

The information gathered was instrumentally important to develop the Special Area Plan Vision and Objectives.

Workshop Instruction and Presentation

Renaissance Planning Group consultants gave a presentation to begin the workshop. An account of the Downtown area existing conditions was presented to set the stage, followed by a brief description of the Special Area Plan requirements and process. Finally, descriptions and visual examples of ideas and strategies were presented to assist stakeholders in considering a desired future for the Downtown area.

Evaluation Worksheets

Workshop participants were provided a list of broad key *ideas* to consider for defining a vision as well as a list of *strategies* to consider for successfully implementing the vision. Worksheets were used to numerically rank the ideas and strategies and participants were encouraged to record additional ideas and strategies, if desired. Also, participants were given additional space on the worksheet to provide more detailed descriptions and definitions of their individual rankings.

Group Discussions

The participants were randomly divided into three groups of stakeholders to discuss their feelings and opinions of the various ideas and strategies considered on the worksheets. A Renaissance Planning Group consultant was present among each of the groups and assisted in facilitating the discussion. Planning & Zoning Division staff also provided assistance and recorded notes of the discussions on large flip charts. After approximately one hour of discussion, a representative from each group presented a verbal report summary of their discussion to the other stakeholders.

INFORMATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Renaissance Planning Group consultants collected and recorded the data and information from the completed worksheets and group discussion notes from the flip charts.

Key Ideas toward a Future Vision

The question was asked, “What key ideas define the future vision for the Downtown area?” Five key ideas specific to the area were included for workshop participants to rank. The lower the number, the greater the level of importance determined for that key idea. Therefore, the lowest total score represented the highest level of importance among the group of five choices. Participants were also encouraged to add key ideas believed to be important, however not listed on the worksheet.

The key ideas were ranked by the community stakeholders in order of importance as follows:

Rank	Key Idea	Total Score
No. 1	Redevelopment Focus	43
No. 2	Tarpon Avenue (i.e. Main Street)	46
No. 3	Connection to Sponge Docks	62
No. 4	Diverse Housing/Lodging Opportunities	70
No. 5	Lemon Street Art/Design District	73

Additional ‘key ideas’ expressed by participants included:

- Make better use of the Pinellas Trail (2)
- Attract new businesses Downtown
- Lodging in Pinellas/Safford corridor
- Parking garage
- Parking (general)

- Improvements in the Spring Bayou
- Provide adequate parking (redevelopment/events)
- Advertising
- Improved streetscape environment including sidewalks
- Multi-modal transportation options

Many of the comments written to address the individual key ideas in the worksheets as well as the notes recorded on the flip charts during group discussions were helpful in developing a more in-depth understanding of the feelings of stakeholders. When aggregated, several comments began to echo some collective thoughts and attitudes of the group. A general summation of worksheet comments and group discussion notes is included, below, and organized by each of the key ideas, in order of their ranking.

Redevelopment Focus

There is an overwhelming sense that Downtown is in need of a change, a renaissance. The area could use a greater variety of land uses with more diverse retail options that cater to both residents and tourists alike. However, the existing physical and architecture character should be respected. Also, Downtown would benefit from a public space component to accommodate a farmer's market and other general gatherings.

Tarpon Avenue (i.e. Main Street)

Tarpon Avenue is the heart of the Downtown core. The area could use a greater mix of land uses with more diverse retail options as well as evening activities. Property improvements, including façade improvements would benefit the look of this area.

Connection to Sponge Docks

The distance between the Downtown and Sponge Docks makes physically linking the two areas difficult. And while it has not been easy to make this connection, it is none the less important. It is also recognized that the Sponge Docks area is the primary draw for visitors. Getting visitors to Downtown will be a challenge. North Pinellas Avenue is an important connecting corridor between the two areas and, thus, should receive special consideration to improve the journey. Other transportation routes should be considered for multi-modal based solutions to improving the connection, including water taxi and bicycle modes. Future wayfinding signage will also help bridge the connection.

Diverse Housing/Lodging Opportunities

It is generally understood that an increase in housing options Downtown will help to improve the overall economic support necessary to encourage a greater mix of businesses that cater to local residents. In addition the Downtown area could benefit from more lodging opportunities for tourists, most likely in the form of bed and breakfast-type establishments.

Lemon Street Art/Design District

Past plans and studies have revealed the potential of Lemon Street as a local Downtown corridor capable of supporting and enhancing the Downtown core. Lemon Street as an artistic enclave would help to support the positive, unique image of Downtown. It could very well become a catalyst for a newly re-focused vibrant, mixed use, diverse Downtown. A key component to the Lemon Street corridor would include the opportunity for housing as well.

Implementation Strategies to Apply

The question was asked, “What strategies are most important to successfully implementing this future vision for the Downtown area?” Seven implementation strategies were included for workshop participants to rank. Same with the ‘key ideas’ question, the lower the number, the greater the level of importance determined for that implementation strategy. Therefore, the lowest total score represented the highest level of importance among the group of ten choices. Participants were also encouraged to add implementation strategies believed to be important, however not listed on the worksheet.

The implementation strategies were ranked by the community stakeholder group in order of importance as follows:

Rank	Implementation Strategy	Total Score
No. 1	Sense of Place	55
No. 2	Development Scale and Use	75
No. 3	Street Network	90
No. 4	Amenities	105
No. 5	Parking	112
No. 6	Building Orientation	118
No. 7	Retail and Housing Development	120

Additional ‘implementation strategies’ expressed by participants included:

- Multi-modal transportation options (2)
- Include north Pinellas Avenue
- Outdoor events
- Use ‘water’ as a strategy
- Provide various development assistance programs

Many of the comments written to address the individual implementation strategies in the worksheets as well as the notes recorded on the flip charts during group discussions provided a better understanding of the strategies idealized. A brief summation of worksheet comments and group discussion notes is included, below, and organized by each of the implementation strategies, in order of their ranking.

Sense of Place (architecture / development character)

The historic look and feel of Downtown should be maintained and improved upon with a general focus on enhancing the existing building fabric through rehabilitation and façade improvements, for example, and assuring that new development respects such fabric and is sensitive to the historic character of the area. The City should consider installing decorative gateway (signage) elements announcing arrival into the City at the main entry points.

Development Scale and Use (density, intensity, and mix of uses)

Increased densities and mixed use development that is compatible with and respects the existing character of Downtown would help to revitalize and strengthen the area. Development should also reinforce the existing pedestrian scale that is enjoyed by much of the Downtown area.

Street Network (vehicular and pedestrian connectivity)

The existing street network in the Downtown area has a reasonably efficient layout. Improvements to the network should be focused primarily on enhancing the area's walkability, improving connections to destinations, and vehicular traffic calming.

Amenities (public space, public art, landscaping, lighting, and furniture)

The Downtown area would benefit greatly from a centrally located, civic-oriented, permanent public space. The space should be able to accommodate festivals and other civic events, and facilitate simple gatherings, meetings, and resting. It should function as the City's 'town square' that can be celebrated by its residents and visitors alike. Both new and existing public spaces and parks should provide comfort, security and beauty through amenities such as benches, shade, bathrooms, lighting, landscaping and public art (i.e. sculpture, fountain).

Parking

Access to and the availability of parking is important; however, it should not dominate the landscape of the Downtown area. Future strategies that will efficiently direct visitors to parking lots while minimizing their physical presence should be explored. This would include exploring approaches to screen parking from pedestrian-oriented roadways through landscape and streetscaping; orienting parking in the rear of properties, behind buildings; and reviewing the feasibility of certain side streets to accommodate parking. Also, opportunities to develop a future public parking garage should continue to be explored. An area strategically located between Downtown and the Sponge Docks may be beneficial and should be considered.

Building Orientation (building siting and frontage)

The area's older, existing building fabric is oriented so that primary building entrances are located in the front of the property, along the sidewalks. This is the historic character of the Downtown core, and new development should conform to that existing character with respect to building placement and orientation so that the consistency in the look and feel of the area is strengthened. Also, building owners and tenants could be encouraged to increase their outdoor activity in front of their buildings through the installation of cafes and display spaces, where appropriate and feasible.

Retail and Housing Development

The combination of retail and housing in mixed use buildings would be beneficial to the future growth and longevity of the Downtown area, as would increased residential densities to support such businesses and strengthen the critical mass of residents in the area. Downtown would also benefit from having greater business diversity to accommodate existing residents and capture a broader market of patrons.

DOWNTOWN - VISION

The Downtown area stakeholder workshop provided valuable information that helped develop a Downtown Vision statement for the Special Area Plan (SAP). The Downtown Vision statement is written, below.

Tarpon Avenue is the historical main street for Tarpon Springs and continues to be the heart of Downtown Tarpon Springs. Unlike the Sponge Docks area, Downtown is not an area driven by tourism. An essential goal of the Downtown Special Area Plan is to orient Downtown to the needs of local residents while creating opportunities in Downtown to capture some benefit from the tourist draw in the Sponge Docks.

Downtown is not limited to Tarpon Avenue and includes several other districts with residential, commercial and civic functions. Another goal of the Downtown Special Area Plan is to redefine Downtown as the sum total of all these districts with diverse uses and users.

Considering the limited number of vacant parcels in Pinellas County, growth in Downtown will depend on redevelopment and infill opportunities. Redevelopment as the driver of future growth in Downtown is another critical consideration.

DOWNTOWN – SPECIAL AREA PLAN OBJECTIVES

The SAP Objectives are intended to guide the future vision for the Downtown area. The SAP provides the strategies for successful implementation of this vision through land use elements such as development scale (density/intensity), sense of place (architecture/development character), amenities (art, lighting, benches, landscaping), building orientation (frontage, building siting), street network (vehicular and pedestrian connectivity), mix of land uses, housing mix, retail development, public space, and parking.

The Downtown area stakeholder workshop provided valuable information to help inform the SAP Objectives. General, overall area Objectives are listed first, followed by more direct place-based Objectives.

PLAN OBJECTIVES - GENERAL

A. Form-Based Guidelines/SmartCode

- Coordinate areas/subareas with SmartCode transect zone definitions.
- Provide form-based development and design standards.
- Coordinate requirements for SAPs with Historic District, Multimodal Transportation District, and Central Business District.

B. Complete Streets

- Organize the road network based on their primary role as transit-oriented, vehicle-oriented, pedestrian-oriented, and local or service-oriented streets.
- Prepare streetscape guidelines to improve vehicular and pedestrian accessibility and mobility.

C. Market Study

- Conduct a market study to assess the current area economic strengths and weaknesses, as well as the market feasibility of future uses, densities and intensities.

D. Parking Study

- Prepare a consolidated parking strategy including parking management, shared parking, and structured parking.

PLAN OBJECTIVES – PLACE-BASED

E. Redevelopment/Infill

- Identify key development/redevelopment sites along Pinellas Avenue for higher density mixed use (residential/retail/office) development.
- Consider infill/redevelopment opportunities within residential areas for other residential development opportunities while maintaining the existing scale and character of these neighborhoods.
- Create recreational open spaces (parks at the intersection of Pinellas Avenue and Meres Boulevard, and at the intersection of Safford Avenue/Pinellas Trail and Live Oak Street) within the CRA.
- Create 'architectural' gateway at Pinellas Avenue and Meres Boulevard.

F. Tarpon Avenue as a 'Main Street'

- Encourage local businesses and retail opportunities along Tarpon Avenue.
- Infill Tarpon Avenue between Pinellas Avenue and Safford Avenue with special consideration to the existing scale and character of Tarpon Avenue.
- Create a public open space along Tarpon Avenue for festival markets, farmer's markets and other events. For example, the parking area at the intersection of Pinellas Avenue and Tarpon Avenue.

- Create an ‘architectural’ gateway at Tarpon Avenue and Grosse Avenue.
- Encourage more tourist accommodations such as B&Bs and Inns along Tarpon Avenue and Orange Avenue west of Pinellas Avenue.

G. Lemon Street District

- Consider residential infill/redevelopment opportunities along Lemon Street for higher density residential typologies such as townhomes and garden apartments.
- Allow live work uses along Lemon Street for artists studios/residences and small art related businesses.
- Create a public open space along Lemon Street for festival markets, farmer’s markets and other events.

H. Connecting Downtown and Sponge Docks

- Create ‘architectural’ gateway at Pinellas Avenue and Tarpon Avenue.
- Utilize Pinellas Trail/Stafford Avenue as a pedestrian and/or bike connection to the Sponge Docks and Downtown.
- Connect the Downtown and the Sponge Docks areas with a feeder bus loop.
- Plan coordinated annual and monthly events that engage local residents and visitors in Downtown and the Sponge Docks alike.