

Part IV

Community Assessment of Issues and Concerns

THE PUBLIC WORKSHOP PROCESS

The foundation for the Tarpon Springs Downtown Development Action Plan was established during a series of focus group meetings and public workshops with City staff and citizens, held in May, June, and July of 2000.

Focus Group Meetings

Focus group meetings with business representatives, resident representatives, government agencies, and government leaders were held to obtain input from those who have a stake in or may have influence on the future of the community. Attendees were asked to respond to a series of questions designed to generate discussion. Questions were designed to extract different information from each group depending on the interest and expertise of the members. Focus group members were also asked to contribute solutions that they felt would resolve some of these issues.

Business representatives were asked to summarize their issues and concerns as they relate to business, including economics, market demographics, current conditions in the downtown, obstacles to business, traffic circulation, regulations, parking, etc. Resident representatives were asked to discuss their general concerns and solutions for their city. Government agencies concentrated on projects and programs that may have an impact on the future of the City, especially the downtown area. Government leaders were given a more detailed overview of the planning process and were presented with the information obtained from the earlier work sessions. They discussed the political and governmental ramifications of the Plan and the issues and concerns of their constituents.

Community Design Workshops

A series of workshops were held in July 2000 to invite residents, business and property owners, and government leaders to participate in the design process. The first workshop began with an overview of the issues gleaned from consultant research and information obtained from the focus groups held in June. A list of strategies to deal with the issues was then presented, and the participants were divided into groups and asked to rank the strategies in order of importance. The second session presented an initial concept plan that echoed the strategies identified in the first design workshop, followed by some questions and comments from the participants. At the final workshop, the Concept Plan was presented. The Plan was refined from the issues and strategies sessions and the preliminary concept. Also presented were the graphic representations of the Plan. After the presentation, the participants were asked to separate into groups and discuss what they liked about the Plan, as well as list their concerns about the Plan.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND CONCERNS

After analyzing the existing conditions in the downtown area and obtaining public input, The RMPK Group was able to identify pertinent issues and concerns, which was necessary to devise strategies and determine community preferences concerning design alternatives.

Transportation:

- Conflicts with through traffic
- Conflicts with autos and pedestrians
- Speeds are too high
- Distance between docks and downtown is too far to walk
- Roadways and sidewalks are in deteriorating condition

Parking:

- Road widths are too small for on-street parking
- Lot sizes are too small for parking when redeveloped
- Seasonal demands create huge quantity variations
- Parking appears inconvenient
- Employers/employees are using up convenient, on-street spaces
- Pedestrian areas discourage walking from remote parking

Urban Design:

- Poor architectural design styles for new construction
- Signage clutter
- Lack of respect for historical context in renovation
- Lack of pedestrian environment on Pinellas Avenue and Pinellas Trail
- Difficult to find one's way around the City
- No sense of arrival

Land Use:

- Current anchors are too far from each other
- Community activity areas and buildings are too spread out, people are forced to drive
- Many businesses are no longer appropriate for changing market
- Lots are too small for redevelopment
- Poor interconnectedness between uses
- Incompatible land uses are intruding into area
- Need open space for public events in downtown

Economics:

- We are leaking tourist money due to lack of overnight stay/multi-day uses
- Properties need to turn over to redevelopers

- Current land uses do not meet market demands
- Need for stronger consumer spending in downtown
- Lack of regional/national marketing
- Missing high-end weekend travelers market

STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

Following is a brief outline summarizing the findings and strategies that constitute the rationale behind the future concept plan. These strategies are the result of consultant research and the staff and community's assessment of the issues and concerns.

- Encourage overnight/multi-day tourist visits
- Create new activity nodes as City "anchors":
 - Arts and culture district
 - Museum district
 - Hospitality/entertainment district
 - Community shopping district
 - Historic downtown district
 - Sponge Docks
- Create a system of transportation that reroutes through traffic and calms local traffic
- Create convenient parking areas adjacent to the anchors
- Create trolley system to route residents and tourists between anchors
- Create public events park in central location
- Create gateways
- Enhance the Pinellas Trail experience
- Streetscape and beautification
- Architectural codes for redevelopment
- Renovation incentives for landowners
- Develop consensus in business community
- Develop marketing strategies and business recruitment
- Historic housing renovations and in-fill development
- Union Academy area revitalization
- Prioritize and fund capital improvements