



OFFICE OF  
MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS

# *City of Tarpon Springs, Florida*

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March 23, 2023

Mr. Whit Blanton  
Executive Director  
Forward Pinellas  
310 Court Street  
Clearwater, FL 33756

Mr. Blanton:

Thank you for your letter concerning the decision on the reapportionment of seats, and your sentiments of how the Forward Pinellas staff can continue working with the City of Tarpon Springs.

By this letter, I wish to also thank those Forward Pinellas Board Council Members who supported our request for an individual seat. The reapportionment was based on regulatory decile review. Consequently, the City of Tarpon Springs does not take this process lightly.

My comments here are my own and do not necessarily reflect the sentiments of the Commission. The fundamental problem for us with your reapportionment process is that the City of Tarpon Springs was not consulted nor were we explained the process. At the meeting, there did not seem to be an issue with that fact which is equally troubling. Again, it was a decile review, not an annual or biannual one.

Your rationale for the need to maintain an odd number of seats to break a tie may offer a convenient reason to vote against our request, but in practice, it is a weak argument. I should point out that the vote for your apportionment plan on that day was 7 "yes" to 5 "no." That is an even number.

Not all deliberative bodies have an odd number of members for the purposes of voting. Their size is based on having the number required to represent its members' needs equally and fairly. For example, our Florida Legislature (120 Representatives, and 40 Senators) is not based on an odd number. Lastly, any measure that needs an odd vote to break a tie in a collegial body such as Forward Pinellas representing one million residents is problematic in and of itself. The measure should be reworked and brought back with greater support. In effect, the message from your comments and that of some of the council members was that about 2.6 percent of the county population (i.e., Tarpon Springs) was not worth the effort of revisiting this matter, even with a close vote. Again, we were not notified, asked, briefed, or consulted, in this matter prior to your vote. All we were told by Vice Mayor Buchman was that Tarpon Springs was being considered for its own seat.

Nevertheless, we came to you asking for help for better representation. We have a population now that rates its own seat based on your staff's analysis of about a 2.5 percent population threshold. We are isolated at the north end of Pinellas County. We are facing unique challenges like those that the southern Pinellas County beach communities faced two decades ago. We are about 90 percent built-out. We believe a focused planning/transportation dialogue within an organization that serves that purpose is by far superior to my discussing matters informally with my colleagues at the Mayors' Council of Pinellas County.

As such, I would like to know whether the Forward Pinellas Council has a process for requesting a reconsideration of this matter? I consulted with city staff as to the benefits of having our own seat before my decision to make this request. The city staff believes we would benefit. However, I do not know without being a council member whether that is allowed under your rules of procedure. I would suspect, as with Robert's Rules of Order, it would require a council member on the prevailing side of the vote to make such a motion and it be passed by a majority. If that is the case, I am requesting a formal agenda item either through you or our representative, Vice Mayor Buchman, at your next meeting to make such a request of the Council Members on the prevailing side. I will also obtain the consent of our City Commission to proceed in this manner.

Please share this letter with the Forward Pinellas Council Members.

Sincerely,



Costa S. Vatikiotis

Mayor

Cc: City of Tarpon Springs Board of Commissioners  
Vice Mayor Jarrod Buchman, Oldsmar  
City Manager Mark LeCouris, Tarpon Springs