

# *4 Procedures to Identify and Implement Joint Planning Areas*

## **JOINT PLANNING AREAS**

Joint planning areas have been identified for most of the larger municipalities within Pinellas County through a cooperative effort between the County and those cities. Joint planning areas have been established through interlocal agreements with Pinellas County for the cities of Tarpon Springs, Clearwater, Dunedin, Safety Harbor, Oldsmar Largo, Pinellas Park and St. Petersburg. In 2008, the City of St. Petersburg terminated their interlocal planning agreement with the County. The interlocal agreements are based on a model agreement that the Board approved with the City of Tarpon Springs in 1989. The primary purpose for the interlocal agreements to identify joint planning areas is to eliminate the need to amend the municipal comprehensive plan every time the municipality expands its boundaries through voluntary annexation. This is achieved by allowing the participating cities to include a joint planning area (which includes both incorporated and unincorporated properties) within their local comprehensive plan, and by requiring that the city's comprehensive plan provides for an intensity of use or density that is equal to or less than the County's Comprehensive Plan for the unincorporated property within the planning area. If this requirement is not met for a specific property, an amendment to the municipal plan is necessary upon annexation.

The boundary of each of the joint planning areas was determined through a cooperative process in which the initiating municipality(ies) and the County work together to reach consensus on an appropriate boundary, which was then sent out to all adjacent local governments for their review and comment. If the adjacent jurisdictions raised no issues, the initiating municipality(ies) and the County each held a public hearing prior to adopting an interlocal agreement recognizing the joint planning area. Several criteria serve as the basis for determining the appropriate boundaries for each planning area. These include existing municipal boundaries, local comprehensive plans, existing infrastructure service areas, and long-established planning sector boundaries.

By establishing the joint planning areas, the Board of County Commissioners enabled the participating cities to eliminate the need for amending their local comprehensive plan when the provisions of the interlocal agreement were met. Defining these areas does not represent a policy statement by the Board that all unincorporated lands within the joint planning areas should, or would eventually, be annexed by the municipality. It was intended, however, that the ultimate limits of a city would be contained within the boundaries of their recognized joint planning area, and that adjacent municipalities would not extend their jurisdiction into this area. The exception to this approach was the Tri-Cities Planning Area, which, in addition to the cities of Largo, Pinellas Park, and St. Petersburg, included the combined unincorporated areas that the three cities would eventually like to annex. It was a composite, as opposed to a distinct, joint planning area. In 2000; however, the Tri-Cities agreement was replaced with individual agreements between the County and each of these cities.

**Existing Coordination Mechanisms:**

Informal coordination, meetings, review, etc., leading to Formal Interlocal Agreements

**Any Need for Additional Coordination:**

While the interlocal agreements establish when an annexation would be in conflict with another municipality's comprehensive plan and planning area, they do not resolve concerns of the Board of County Commissioners and certain property owners over municipal requirements for annexation, or annexation agreements prior to providing essential public services such as sanitary sewer service.

**Infrastructure Service Areas:**

The small size of Pinellas County (only 280 square miles), the presence of 25 local governments, and the rapid progress of urbanization since World War II have required Pinellas County and its municipalities to coordinate closely on the provision of essential public services and facilities, and to reach agreement on which local government is responsible for providing urban services to a particular area. One of the earliest examples of this cooperation are the 201 Studies that were done in the 1970s to determine an effective approach to providing sanitary sewer service within Pinellas County and its municipalities. This was an extensive planning effort that divided the County into distinct sanitary sewer service areas each to be served by a regional facility. Interlocal agreements were adopted by local governments throughout the County recognizing these service areas and agreeing that, for each service area, one jurisdiction would be responsible for operating a wastewater treatment facility, thus eliminating duplication of service and promoting the use of regional treatment facilities, which were considered to be more efficient and effective in treating wastewater. Comparable efforts over the years have resulted in specific agreements or other arrangements between local governments in Pinellas County with respect to delineating service areas for other public services such as the provision and distribution of potable water and fire protection. As a result, service areas have been formally identified and are being implemented throughout Pinellas County and its municipalities for the provision of essential urban facilities and services.

**Existing Coordination Mechanisms:**

Interlocal agreements, service agreements, contracts, County Charter, etc.

**Any Need for Additional Coordination:**

See discussion under Joint Planning Areas above.