3 Local and Regional Influences on the Pinellas County Economy

OVERVIEW

Every local area in the United States to some degree has its own unique, inherent economic advantages and disadvantages. Such conditions are based on various factors, some of which being location, geography, demographics, growth patterns, development history, past decision-making and so on. Pinellas County has several important, distinguishing factors affecting its economic composition and identity. Perhaps the most important and crucial factor at this point in the County's economic timeline, and in terms of moving forward toward future prosperity, is its near built-out status. With little vacant land and few greenfield development opportunities remaining, Pinellas County's economic future will rely heavily on quality redevelopment efforts.

This chapter discusses Pinellas County's distinguishing features, with particular emphasis on the County's near built-out condition and the corresponding redevelopment opportunities and costs. It should be noted that while Pinellas County is unique in many ways, it does not exist in a vacuum. Some of the County's distinguishing factors also apply to the Tampa Bay region as a whole. In such cases where economic decisions and policies are derived from, and apply to, regional-based factors, intergovernmental coordination and cooperation are of the utmost importance for the economic benefit of the entire region.

DISTINGUISHING FACTORS

Location and Geography

Pinellas County's location along the west coast of Florida and ample coastline have played key roles in the County's development and economic composition. Its mild winter climate and coastal amenities are major draws for tourists and retirees. As discussed in the Economic History section of this *Economic Element*, the establishments of settlements and commerce beginning in the 19th Century, the increase in Americans' leisure time and the mass availability of air conditioning beginning in the mid-20th Century were major factors toward Pinellas County becoming a notable tourist and retirement destination, which it remains to the present day. Also, the long coastline and surrounding waters greatly contributed to the growth of the local marine industry, and an ample supply of waterfront property provides a valuable and relatively stable tax base.

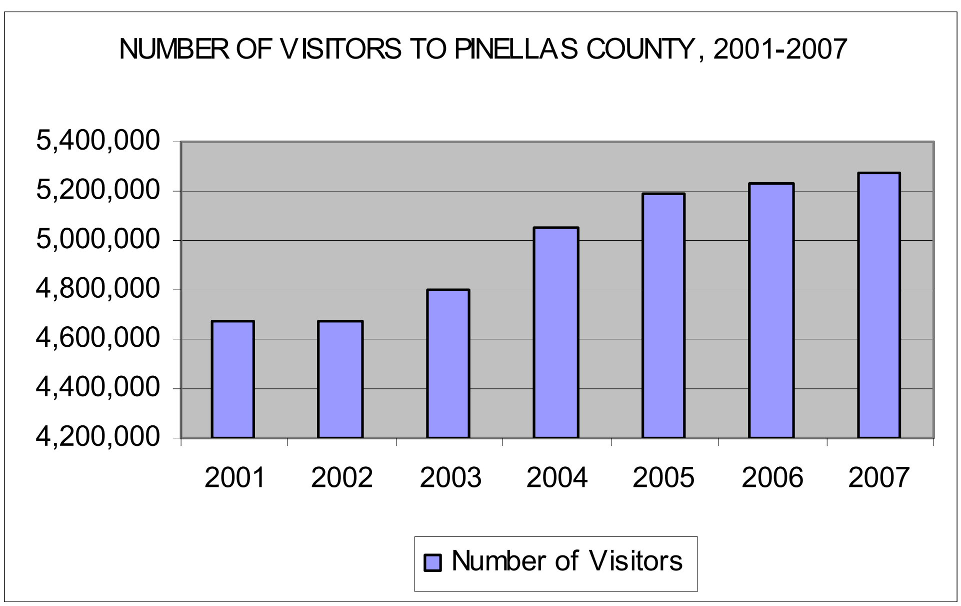
While the local climate and geography can be an important positive quality-of-life factor and potential attractor of business, they also have negative aspects. The warm breezes and pleasant waters of winter give way to sweltering temperatures and potentially violent weather in summer. The County's peninsular geography makes hurricane evacuation difficult and creates potential transportation challenges. Four of the major routes into and out of Pinellas County require travel over causeways or bridges. The linear shape of the peninsula makes beltways and bypasses largely infeasible. The following paragraphs expand upon these various locational strengths and weaknesses touched on thus far.

Tourism

Pinellas County is one of the most popular tourist destinations on the Gulf Coast of Florida. It enjoyed over 5.3 million overnight visitors in 2007, a number that has increased by 11.4 percent since 2002 (see **Figure 10**). The County's 35 miles of white sandy barrier island beaches are undoubtedly the major draw. As **Table 30** attests, people from across the country and various parts of the world, particularly Europe and Canada, visit Pinellas County. According to the St. Petersburg/Clearwater Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, the five largest U.S. feeder markets outside of Florida were New York (8.9 percent), Chicago (8.0 percent), Detroit (4.7 percent), Philadelphia (4.7 percent), and Boston (4.6 percent). The tourism-related industries (lodging, restaurants and specialty retail) contributed over $2.1 billion in gross sales and over $120 million in taxes to Pinellas County in 2005 (see **Table 31**). Gross sales and tax collections for the lodging industry increased 26.2 percent and 20.9 percent, respectively, from 1998 to 2005. For this same time frame, restaurants increased gross sales by 29.8 percent and tax collections by 29.7 percent. Specialty retail increased gross sales by 1.8 percent, while tax collections decreased by 8.3 percent. Except for minor fluctuations, gross sales and tax collections have shown a steady growth trend during the 2000s, contributing to the Pinellas County economy.

It is also important to mention that the Pinellas County tourism industry is diversifying as it expands its destination assets beyond the County's outstanding beaches and excellent year-round weather to include a wide selection of natural, cultural and historic attractions. This diversification is enabling the County to capitalize on an increasing interest among visitors in cultural/heritage tourism and ecotourism.

FIGURE 10



Source: St. Petersburg/Clearwater Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2008.

TABLE 30
POPULAR ORIGINS OF VISITORS TO PINELLAS COUNTY, 2001-2007

Year	Florida	Southeast	Northeast	Midwest	Canada	Europe
2001	473,216	307,717	1,050,161	1,453,121	346,648	857,759
2002	519,880	317,508	1,063,960	1,538,306	303,251	756,971
2003	522,435	326,226	1,118,221	1,577,069	296,475	789,453
2004	511,473	325,007	1,201,077	1,658,530	317,612	862,583
2005	493,005	319,115	1,266,594	1,707,769	324,682	903,459
2006	559,916	305,039	1,267,716	1,707,860	339,817	886,191
2007	548,757	321,887	1,307,040	1,709,323	338,521	873,656

Source: St. Petersburg/Clearwater Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2008.

TABLE 31
TOURIST RELATED INDUSTRIES IN PINELLAS COUNTY
(in millions of dollars)

YEAR	LODGING[1]		RESTAURANTS[2]		SPECIALIST RETAIL[3]	
	Gross Sales	Tax Collections[4]	Gross Sales	Tax Collections[4]	Gross Sales	Tax Collections[4]
1998	448.4	26.3	1,073.5	62.9	175.5	7.8
1999	499.0	26.5	1,158.6	61.2	173.1	8.0
2000	522.7	29.9	1,180.4	67.8	194.2	7.8
2001	522.6	29.6	1,209.6	69.8	194.6	7.8
2002	474.8	21.4	1,332.1	70.3	182.1	7.5
2003	501.4	28.2	1,240.0	70.6	179.4	7.9
2004	524.3	30.3	1,319.7	76.3	180.6	7.3
2005	565.9	31.8	1,393.2	81.6	178.7	7.2

SOURCE: Florida Department of Revenue, Office of Tax Research, County by Kind Report, 1998-2005

[1] Kind codes 39, sic codes 6513, 6514, 6515, 7011, 7021, 7032, 7033, 7041; includes hotels, motels, tourist courts, sporting and recreation camps, trailer parks for transients, membership basis organization hotels, mobile home site operators, apartment building operators, dwelling operators (except apartments), rooming and boarding houses

[2] Kind code 08, sic code 5812; includes restaurants, lunchrooms and catering services

[3] Kind code 55, sic codes 5943, 5945, 5947; includes the following stores: gift, souvenir, card, novelty, hobby, craft, stationery, toy, game and taxidermy

[4] Tax collections include sales and use taxes

By employing over 85,000 individuals and generating over $3 billion in area wages, tourism is undoubtedly a primary contributor to Pinellas County's local economy. Most of this money comes from outside the county. Earlier in its history, the Pinellas County economy was largely driven by tourism. The present economy is much more diversified, making the County less susceptible to periodic economic downturns that may hit one particular industry harder than others. In terms of tourism, for example, the economic conditions of specific regions of the United States, coupled with the Canadian, European and other foreign economies, impact the economic performance of visitor-related industries. Significant world events also play a crucial role, as do weather phenomena such as hurricanes. Vacations and leisure time are often seen as dispensable luxuries. Fewer visitors mean declining revenues and fewer tax dollars collected. By complementing tourism with high-wage industries that support sustained monetary flow from outside the region, the local economy is stronger and more resilient overall. Please see the Long-Term Economic Goals and Objectives section of this *Economic Element* for further information.

Retirement Industry

Pinellas County has for many years been a popular destination for retirees, who are attracted in large part by the balmy winter weather and year-round outdoor activities. Many of the County's retirees are seasonal residents from the northeast and mid-west regions of the United States who come here to escape the wintry weather back home. As of 2005, Pinellas County's seasonal resident population was estimated at 78,116. That number is expected to increase to 82,550 by 2025. Many retirees also choose to live in Pinellas County year-round, becoming permanent residents. Looking back at **Table 4**, 20.72 percent of the 2006 population was age 65 and over, significantly higher than all of the non-Florida comparison areas.

With more than one in five Pinellas County residents aged 65 and over, retirees make up a significant proportion of the population. They are an important component of the local economy, bringing in dollars from outside the county in the form of pension funds, health plans and retirement accounts. Their presence also creates jobs for many professionals who service their specific needs. Unfortunately, specific numbers as to the economic impact of the retirement industry in Pinellas County are unavailable at this time, but it is thought to be significant. Like tourism, however, the retirement sector is now just one piece of an increasingly diversified collection of industries. The diversification of the local economy has helped establish the high-paying jobs that drive continued economic growth, while complementing the service-oriented businesses that serve retirees. A larger non-retired population made possible by economic diversification means more working age individuals and a larger pool of qualified workers that many high-paying businesses are searching for.

Marine Industry

Pinellas County's ties to the water are extensive. Because of its small geographic size and unique peninsular location separating the Gulf of Mexico from Tampa Bay, no areas within its boundaries are more than just a few miles from the shore. Pinellas County's shoreline provides an abundance of natural and economic resources. It also provides an important source of recreation for residents and visitors.

The marine industry in Pinellas County accounts for only a small portion of the County's overall economy, and contributes relatively few high-paying jobs. It is primarily an outgrowth of the County's coastal location and shoreline attributes. Nevertheless, it contributes immeasurably to the County's unique ambiance and coastal lifestyle and therefore should be embraced and encouraged where appropriate. For additional information on marine-based industries and water dependent uses in Pinellas County, please see the *Coastal Management Element* of this Comprehensive Plan.

Tropical Cyclones

The prevalence of tropical cyclones in the Gulf of Mexico and the very real potential for direct hits on Pinellas County from hurricanes is undeniably an economic disadvantage. Even the threat of a hurricane making landfall in the region can be a major, if only temporary, disruption for local businesses. Hurricane threats also force more stringent, and costly, building and construction standards that require storm resistance measures. Property insurance rates also tend to be more expensive in hurricane vulnerable areas. All of these factors can add up to significant costs and may influence prospective businesses' relocation and expansion decisions. Even though the Tampa Bay area has not experienced a direct hit from a land falling hurricane since 1921, the potential is there and the threat remains year after year. In the wake of several near misses form hurricanes in 2004 and 2005, and in realizing the devastation in the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina, the prudence and value of business recovery plans are readily apparent. The Pinellas County Economic Development Department has developed a disaster plan for steps to take before and after the storm, and a template for all businesses to use to create their own business recovery plans. For more information on hurricane preparation and natural disaster planning in Pinellas County, please see the *Coastal Management Element*.

<u>A Peninsula on a Peninsula</u>
Pinellas County has the particular distinction of being a peninsula on a peninsula. Its 280 square miles are collectively surrounded by water on three sides. It is directly connected to the rest of peninsular Florida on its northern end and northeast corner. The remainder of its connectivity is via four bridges/causeways on its east and south sides. Therefore, travel options into and out of the county are few compared to many other areas of similar population, and, due to its narrow width, space for transportation infrastructure expansion within its interior is also limited. Only one Interstate highway (I-275 and its spurs) and one rail line traverse portions of Pinellas County. Being mostly surrounded by water also limits outward growth potential. Thus, the same locational and geographic features that fed its rapid development and made Pinellas the State of Florida's first essentially built out county also create the disadvantages of having little elbow room and limited connectivity with adjacent counties. Please continue reading for a more thorough discussion on Pinellas County's built out condition later in this chapter.

Diversity of the Local Economy
As mentioned in the previous section, Pinellas County's coastal location and mild climate helped establish tourism and the retirement industry as significant components of the local economy. Since the mid-20th Century, however, the County has become much more economically diversified. In the 1950s, the aerospace industry and other electronic manufacturers became established, due mainly to increased federal spending for defense and space exploration. Many manufacturers were also lured by the area's cheap land and labor. Shortly thereafter, the Pinellas County Industrial Council was established to encourage economic development and enhance employment opportunities. The influx of manufacturing facilities provided a base for diversification that continues to the present day. A diverse economy is a strength that stifles stagnation and helps weather the ups and downs that one particular industry may face from time to time. An economy that relies too heavily on one particular sector is an economy that is less resilient to economic downturns and recessions. For more information on County strategies and programs designed to continue to enhance local economic diversity, please see Chapter 4 of this *Economic Element*.

Intergovernmental Opportunities and Challenges
Despite being Florida 2nd smallest county geographically at just 280 square miles, Pinellas County contains 24 separate municipal entities within its borders. Intergovernmental coordination, including economic development initiatives, can be challenging when more than two dozen local governments (including the County) are involved, each with their own distinct issues and concerns. Municipalities in Pinellas County have very broad and varied

characteristics. For perspective, **Figure 11** depicts Pinellas County and all of its municipal and unincorporated jurisdictions, and **Table 32** lists the jurisdictions from largest to smallest populations. Regardless of the difficulties, local governments in Pinellas County have largely worked together on many pressing issues for the betterment of all Pinellas County residents. The issue of economic development is no exception. The Pinellas County Economic Development Department helps facilitate intergovernmental coordination and partnerships regarding economic development initiatives.

Regional cooperation and partnerships are also important toward fostering economic initiatives that provide benefits beyond Pinellas County's borders, and vice versa. Pinellas County is an integral component of the greater Tampa Bay metropolitan area. As a region, Tampa Bay competes economically with other large metro areas in Florida, the southeastern United States, and around the world. Regional connectivity, broad transportation issues, and future growth are just a few of the myriad issues that require regional cooperation for success. The interconnectivity of adjacent counties in the Tampa Bay area, where workforces and job opportunities are shared, cannot be overstressed. For additional information on Pinellas County's intergovernmental agreements, cooperation and partnerships, please see the *Intergovernmental Coordination Element* of this comprehensive plan.

TABLE 32
LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN PINELLAS COUNTY

JURISDICTION	**POPULATION** (2007 est.)	**LAND AREA** (sq. miles)
Unincorporated County	276,363	112.8
St. Petersburg	253,369	59.6
Clearwater	110,469	25.8
Largo	75,924	15.7
Pinellas Park	49,320	14.7
Dunedin	37,662	10.4
Tarpon Springs	24,628	9.0
Seminole	18,739	4.0
Safety Harbor	17,844	4.9
Oldsmar	13,959	8.9
Gulfport	12,814	2.8
St. Pete Beach	10,086	2.3
Treasure Island	7,597	1.6
South Pasadena	5,658	0.6
Indian Rocks Beach	5,300	0.8
Kenneth City	4,567	0.7
Madeira Beach	4,525	1.0
Belleair	4,158	1.8
Redington Shores	2,440	0.4
Belleair Bluffs	2,181	0.5
Indian Shores	1,804	0.3
Belleair Beach	1,617	0.6
Redington Beach	1,597	0.4
North Redington Beach	1,504	0.3
Belleair Shore	74	0.1

Source: Pinellas County Planning Department, 2008.

FIGURE 11

UNINCORPORATED AREAS AND MUNICIPALITIES IN PINELLAS COUNTY

MARCH 2008

Build-out

Pinellas County has little room left to grow in the traditional sense of greenfield development. Based on data compiled for the recent update of the *Future Land Use and Quality Communities Element* of this Comprehensive Plan, only 5.1 percent (8,124 acres) of land in Pinellas County remains vacant and developable. This lack of space is significant because businesses and industry need room to relocate and grow. **Table 33** breaks down the remaining vacant developable land in Pinellas County and the land uses relevant for economic development purposes. Of the 8,124 vacant developable acres in Pinellas County, only 1,771 are designated for industrial use and 692 for general commercial use. Another 391 vacant acres are potentially available for office uses. Also, importantly, there are very few remaining areas of vacant developable land that are large enough to support the siting or relocation of a large business. The remaining vacant land is predominantly sporadic and spread out across various areas of the County. Infill is the most logical form of development for many of these areas. To demonstrate the fragmentation, **Figure 12** and **Figure 13** depict the remaining vacant developable tracts of land that are five acres in size or larger for north and south Pinellas County, respectively.

There are other important considerations for a built out county besides a lack of available developable vacant land. In many areas, predominant land uses are well-established, however in some instances residential uses have begun to encroach upon traditionally commercial and industrial areas. In places where this has occurred, it may be difficult to expand high intensity uses such as industrial because of the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) effect. As a result, in certain locations where industrial and commercial uses could expand into adjacent vacant areas it becomes difficult or infeasible to do so. Also, transportation networks are by and large set in place in a built out county. There is little flexibility to build new roads or realign existing ones to better serve incoming industry.

Build out has some positive aspects. For example, infrastructure (water, sewer, etc.) is already in place throughout most of the County and ready to serve new businesses. Also, employment areas are generally closer to housing options, resulting in shorter commutes. Regardless, being built out means that Pinellas County has to devise and utilize creative ways to bring in new jobs and keep the local economy growing, a task made all the more challenging considering the ample greenfield areas still available in neighboring counties. To compete with these areas and to ensure the economy remains healthy, Pinellas County must increasingly turn to redevelopment as the answer.

It is relevant to mention that the recent building boom and market correction may have exposed a benefit of Pinellas County's near built out status. While numerous condominiums and other multifamily housing projects were erected over the boom years in Pinellas County, particularly in waterfront areas where profits could be maximized, large scale sprawling housing projects were not developed, simply because there was no space for them. Neighboring counties and other areas in Florida experienced tremendous growth in the form of massive housing projects in greenfield areas. Many of these projects remain at least partially vacant and unfinished. As a result, housing vacancy rates are high, prices are falling and many construction jobs have been lost. In short, it is thought that Pinellas County's high proportion of developed land is more stable and more resilient to building booms and busts.

The discussion on build out brings up an important question: Does build out impact the nature of the local economy? One certain aspect about build out is that it makes the local economy less dependent and reliant on growth in the traditional sense. Instead, a built-out county will have to rely heavily on redevelopment and reuse to grow its economy. Redevelopment is more costly and complex than greenfield development, which directly impacts the construction industry. What other industries are impacted, and in what way? These are questions that Pinellas County will face as it continues to transition into build out.

For more information on the challenges and consequences of build out in Pinellas County, please see the *Planning to Stay Element* of this Comprehensive Plan.

TABLE 33
VACANT DEVELOPABLE LAND IN PINELLAS COUNTY BY RELEVANT LAND USE CATEGORY

Future Land Use Designation	Municipal Acreage	Unincorporated Acreage	County Total
*Industrial Limited	1,091.95	347.62	1,439.56
*Industrial General	206.81	123.85	330.66
*Commercial General	533.19	158.98	692.17
Commercial Limited	29.71	0.00	29.71
*Commercial Neighborhood	4.91	8.00	12.91
*Commercial Recreation	1.76	2.61	4.37
*Residential/Office General	201.37	16.46	217.83
*Residential/Office/ Retail	86.72	70.38	157.10
*Residential/Office Limited	13.44	2.27	15.72
Resort Facilities Medium	12.72	0.00	12.72
Resort Facilities High	14.91	0.00	14.91
*Community Redevelop. District-Activity Center	0.00	1.65	1.65
Community Redevelopment District	157.91	0.00	157.91
Central Business District	109.05	0.00	109.05
**Other	2,088.39	2,839.11	4,927.50
TOTALS	**4,552.83**	**3,570.91**	**8,123.74**

* Unincorporated Future Land Use Map (FLUM) Categories
** Includes various Residential, Institutional, and Transportation/Utility Categories
*** Overlay FLUM categories are not included
Source: Pinellas County Planning Department, October 2007

VACANT LAND IN PINELLAS COUNTY 5 ACRES OR GREATER MARCH 2007

VACANT LAND

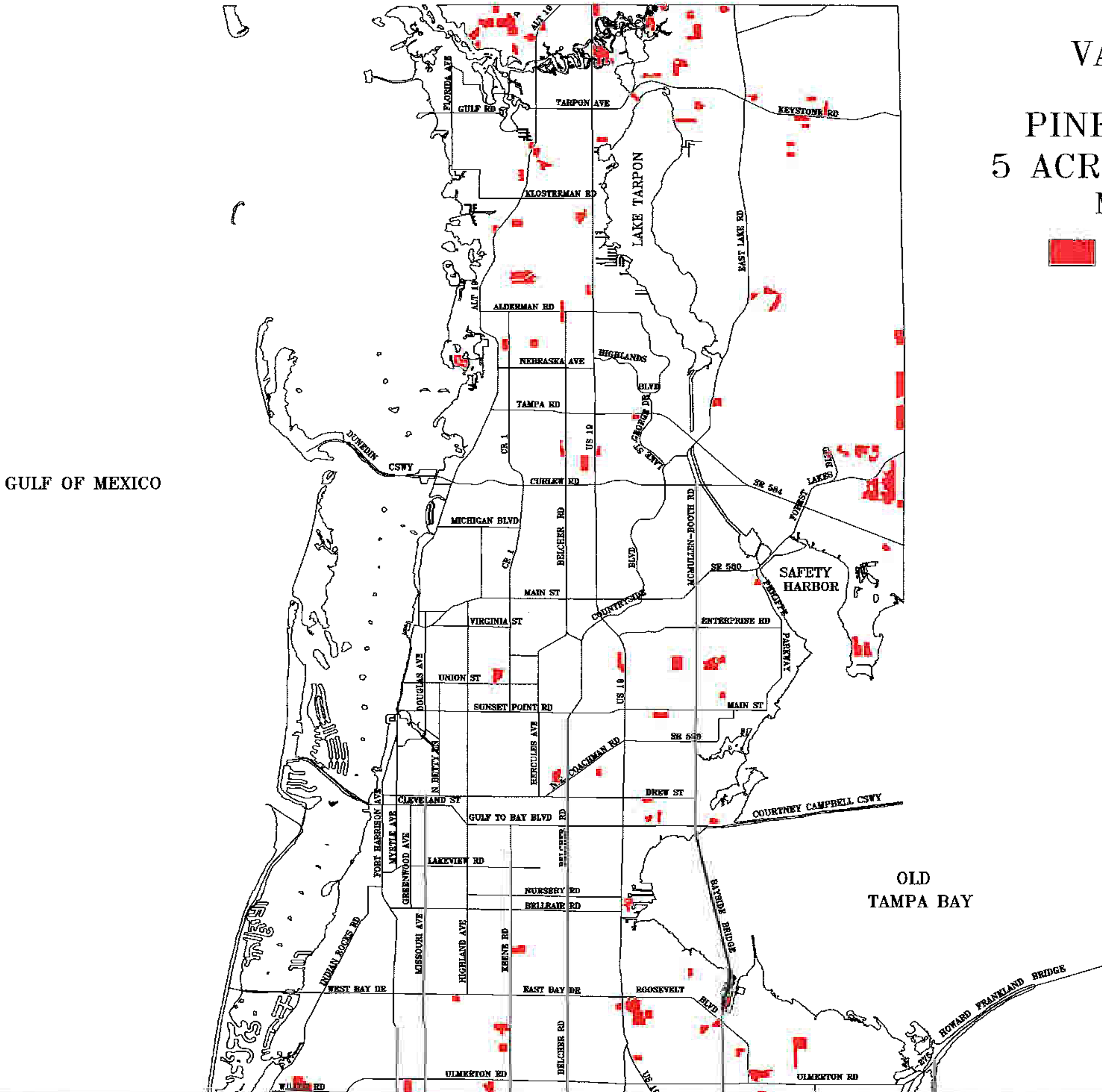


FIGURE 11

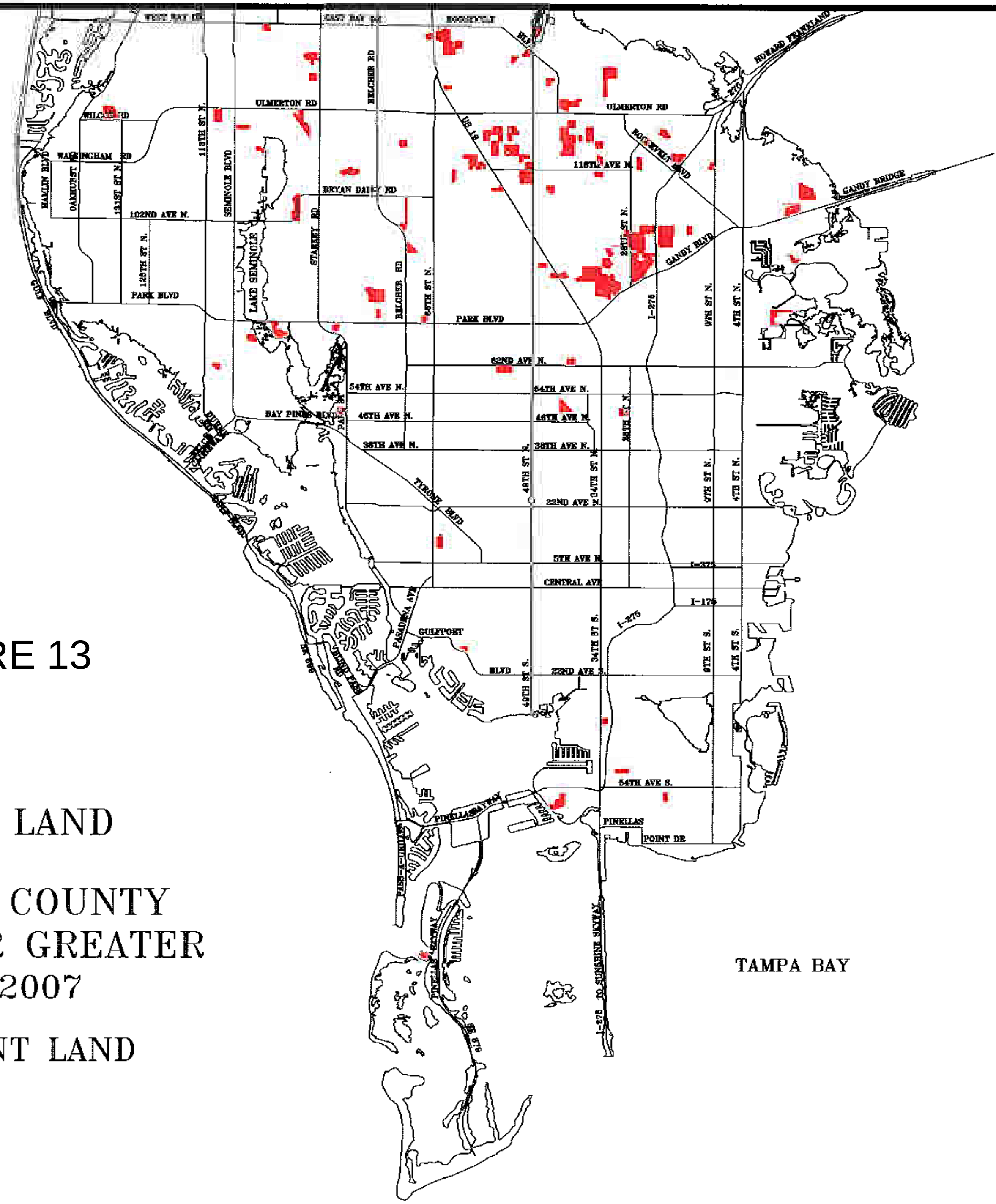
N

Pinellas County PLANNING

NORTH PINELLAS COUNTY

Pvacant 5acres N.pic

FIGURE 13



VACANT LAND
IN
PINELLAS COUNTY
5 ACRES OR GREATER
MARCH 2007

VACANT LAND

Pinellas County PLANNING

SOUTH
PINELLAS COUNTY

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REDEVELOPMENT COSTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

As discussed previously, build-out confronts Pinellas County and its municipalities with one obvious resource constraint – the lack of large tracts of raw undeveloped land. As a result, most businesses desiring to locate or expand in Pinellas County will find it necessary to redevelop property or reuse and renovate existing structures. A major drawback of redeveloping 'used' land is that it is oftentimes much more expensive than building on raw undeveloped land on the edges of the metropolitan area due to a variety of reasons such as necessary tear downs, cleanup costs, land assembly, etc. This additional cost, however, can be offset by providing businesses and their employees with amenities, resources, infrastructure and services, and a quality of life that sets Pinellas County apart from other areas. Redevelopment of commercial and industrial properties may also need to be supplemented with assistance from the public sector, such as in the cleanup of contaminated sites. For more information on support services and business assistance programs, see the 'Policies/Strategies for Achievement' section of this Element.

In addition to the higher expense of redevelopment as compared with greenfield development, it can be challenging for certain businesses to find adequate redevelopment sites for their operations. For example, large contiguous areas may be needed, extensive access to existing transportation facilities may be required, a particular site configuration may be necessary, and so on. In such instances, public sector land assembly assistance may be helpful and warranted. In addition, adequate infrastructure and utilities must be in place. Retrofitting existing facilities tends to be expensive, and may be rather time consuming as well. On the other hand, it could be less expensive if the necessary infrastructure is already in place and in good condition. An additional aspect discussed earlier worth mentioning again is that even if an adequate redevelopment site is found, area compatibility and negative public sentiment may be issues that are difficult to overcome if land use and/or zoning changes are needed, particularly for proposed high intensity uses.

While there are notable constraints, the redevelopment process also provides opportunities to improve local landscapes and functionalities. For example, much of the previous development in Pinellas County followed a pattern in which the buildings where people shop, work and obtain services were primarily located along the County's major roadways. This development pattern resulted in extensive linear commercial corridors where the primary orientation is toward the roadway, providing easy accessibility for the automobile. The businesses and transactions that occur in the numerous shopping centers, office buildings, and manufacturing facilities contained within these corridors represent a significant portion of the local economy. Over time, development along portions of these corridors has become obsolete due to changes in demographics, shopping patterns, and the road network itself. The results are underutilized properties and a distressed appearance that can have a negative impact on the surrounding community and the local economy. Opportunities abound where local governments can work in conjunction with developers to replace obsolete structures and land use patterns with completely new uses and buildings. Successful conversions would do much to revitalize dilapidated areas of the county and cities that have suffered disinvestment and deterioration for a number of reasons.

The limited amount of vacant land within Pinellas County can provide an incentive to redevelop and revitalize stressed industrial and commercial properties and corridors. For example, the desire for additional manufacturing space prompted Pinellas County and the cities of Clearwater and St. Petersburg to allow light manufacturing uses within commercial corridors on a case-by-case basis. This flexibility resulted in some abandoned commercial properties being converted to light manufacturing use (e.g. the former property located at Klosterman Road and Alternate U.S. Highway 19), bringing jobs closer to employees and diversifying the local economy by adding manufacturing jobs. But this is only one response. Pinellas County and its municipalities must take a thorough look at these commercial corridors to ensure that they are able to successfully adapt to the ever changing demands of the community and the marketplace.

Another important beneficial side effect of redevelopment is the opportunity for environmental improvement. Site engineering and construction techniques have vastly improved since the time most development originally occurred in Pinellas County. By utilizing these improved techniques, designing better projects and enforcing improved regulations, the potential for less environmental harm improves greatly, particularly in regard with stormwater management. Low-Impact Development (LID) and green building and design standards are particularly important components of environmentally-responsible development, and the County strongly encourages their use. Building green helps businesses reduce energy costs and save money in the long run. In addition, the cleanup and remediation of contaminated sites via the redevelopment process will remove pollution from Pinellas soils and prevent the leaching of contaminants into area waterways.

Finally, responsible redevelopment can help many areas become more people-oriented and pedestrian friendly, giving them a greater sense of place and 'livability', unlike the auto-centric strip developments of times past. Even employment centers and areas of heavy commerce can benefit from such design. For more information on redevelopment in Pinellas County, please see the *Planning to Stay Element* and the *Quality Communities and Future Land Use Element* of this Comprehensive Plan.

OTHER COMPETITIVE STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES OF PINELLAS COUNTY

In addition to the subjects discussed above, the Pinellas County Economic Development Department has identified several other competitive strengths and weaknesses for Pinellas County. Some of these items are compared to areas in and outside of Florida. They are briefly described in the paragraphs below.

Competitive Strengths

<u>Cost of Living/Labor Costs</u>
Pinellas County's cost of living is 98 percent of the national average, which is below the Florida High Tech Corridor's ranking and very competitive with other similar Florida locations (see Chapter 2 for more information).

<u>International Connections</u>
Pinellas County is located in one of Florida's strongest international trade hubs, boasting a globally-competitive asset base that includes high-tech research, manufacturing and a developed infrastructure with logistical connectivity to U.S. and global markets through two

international airports, a major sea port (the nearby Port of Tampa is the largest port in Florida and handles half of the State's seaborne cargo tonnage) and an active World Trade Center. Key markets include Mexico, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the Caribbean. Also, the Tampa Bay U.S. Export Assistance Center of the U.S. Department of Commerce is located in Pinellas County.

Pinellas County is home to Free Trade Zone (FTZ) 193, created to expedite trade and increase the global competitiveness of U.S. based companies by eliminating formal customs entry procedures and import duties. FTZ 193 locations include the St. Petersburg/Clearwater International Airport, the Port of St. Petersburg and the Young-Rainey STAR Center.

Taxes

Florida has no personal income tax, no corporate franchise tax on capital stock, no goods-in-transit tax, no sales tax on goods manufactured or produced in Florida for export outside the State, no corporate income tax on limited partnerships, and no corporate income tax on subchapter S-corporations.

Commuting Time

Pinellas County has a very favorable commuting time for people who live in the County. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, almost half have an average commute of less than 20 minutes, lower than any of the other highly populated counties in the State of Florida.

Right to Work

Florida is a Right to Work state with one of the third lowest unionization rates in the United States.

Diversified Economy

Pinellas County's diverse economy and population are attractive to companies seeking assorted skills, suppliers or consumer markets. With established clusters in a variety of high-value added manufacturing and other industries (e.g. finance, insurance, distribution), there are ample available inputs for a variety of niche companies. Pinellas ranks second in the State in manufacturing employment.

Available Labor Market

The St. Petersburg-Clearwater-Tampa MSA is the largest metropolitan area in Florida, and the 20th largest in the United States.

High Education Standards

Pinellas County's educational system has many positive attributes. The commitment of Pinellas County Schools to the education of its students is reflected in the range of opportunities available through the countywide magnet and fundamental schools. The areas of focus for these schools range from medical technologies to international relations.

Higher Education Opportunities

The American Association of Community Colleges named St. Petersburg College's eCampus the Outstanding Distance Education Program in America. The University of South Florida is the second-largest university in the southeast and among the top 20 in the nation in enrollment. Two important features of the University that influence the local economy are its research activity and graduate school program. Eckerd College's Leadership Development Institute is a Network Associate of the Center for Creative Leadership.

Competitive Challenges

Perceived Low Education Standards
There is a negative perception of educational systems in the State of Florida as a whole.

Existing Infrastructure Capacity
In addition to the transportation issues discussed earlier, the limited rail service is a concern for some business sectors. Also, water supply is a perceived negative issue.

'Low-Tech' Perception
Florida is perceived by some as a 'slow paced', primarily tourism-oriented environment with little or no high-tech workforce.