

# 15 *Pinellas County Historic Preservation Program*

## **LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS**

The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners conducted the two previously discussed historic and archaeological resource surveys of Pinellas County based on several policies contained in the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan. The Plan also contains policies that required the Board of County Commissioners to adopt regulations that provide for the protection, preservation, and appropriate use of significant historic and archaeological resources.

In February 1992, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners adopted a Historic Preservation Ordinance and amended the Zoning Ordinance to provide for a Historic Preservation Overlay Zoning District. In 1993, the Historic Preservation and Zoning Ordinances were amended to provide for protection of archaeological resources through use of an Archaeological Preservation Overlay Zoning District.

In 1994, the Board of County Commissioners designated old downtown Palm Harbor as a local historic district. The Downtown Palm Harbor Historic District has nine contributing and 24 non-contributing properties that are governed by specific Design Criteria adopted by the Board of County Commissioners for the District.

In January of 1996, the Board of County Commissioners adopted an Ordinance, pursuant to Section 196.1997 of the Florida Statutes, which provides for ad valorem tax exemptions for improvements to historic properties. This is an important incentive not only to encourage historic preservation but also to facilitate the restoration/rehabilitation of historic properties and improve or stabilize the unique characteristics of a community or specific property.

In March of 1997, Pinellas County voters approved an additional extension of a Penny tax for major capital improvement projects in the County. One of these projects is a \$3.5 million infrastructure improvements/restoration work for Downtown Palm Harbor Historic District.

## **STATE GRANTS**

Since 1990, the Board of County Commissioners has been awarded three historic and archaeological grants through the State Division of Historic Resources, which helped the implementation of historic resources policies contained in the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan adopted in 1989.

The first grant project assisted the County in conducting a comprehensive survey of historical and archaeological resources in unincorporated Pinellas County. The total cost of this project was \$29,280.

The second grant project assisted the County for a supplementary survey of historic structures in unincorporated Pinellas County (Ozona and Crystal Beach areas) and for a countywide automation of historic resources in Pinellas County, including archaeological resources for the

unincorporated area. This supplementary survey was conducted in 1993 as part of a continued need identified in the first comprehensive historic resources survey conducted in 1991. The focus of this supplementary survey was to complete the identification of historical structures in the Ozona and Crystal Beach areas. The automation of historic resource data was also part of this project.

The purpose of this automation project was to develop a historic resource information system in which the location of historic and archaeological resources in Pinellas County and the supporting documentation (attribute data) for these resources is placed in the County's Geographic Information System (GIS). The historic resources information system included historic structures throughout Pinellas County and archaeological resources for unincorporated areas only. The Pinellas County GIS historic database now contains information on more than 1800 historic structures that have been filed in the Florida Master Site Plan. Most of this information was obtained from the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and Pinellas County municipalities.

The benefits of the Pinellas County automation of historic resources project is that the County GIS serves as a computerized data storage, analysis, and management tool where historic and archaeological information are readily available to the County and municipalities for planning and land development regulation, and for implementation of local historic preservation ordinances.

The total cost of the second grant project was \$33,090. The project began in 1992 and was completed in 1993. The third grant project, the Yat Kitischee Public Archaeology Project, began in 1992 and was completed in 1996. The total cost of this project is estimated to be over \$900,000. Details of this project were previously discussed.

## **HERITAGE VILLAGE**

Pinellas County Heritage Village Historical Museum is a 21-acre open-air historical village that contains some of the Pinellas County's most historic buildings. First opened to the public in 1976, Heritage Village is funded in its operations by the Board of County Commissioners and supported in its activities by the Pinellas County Historical Society and other community groups. Heritage Village contains more than 28 historic structures. Exhibits include a railroad depot and caboose, an early 1900s mercantile store and service garage, a mid-19th century log house, a doctor's office from the 1920s, a 13-room Victorian home, and a one-room schoolhouse. The old Pass-A-Grille Church and Judge Hartley House are two new satellite additions to the Heritage Village in recent years.



## **THE FUTURE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

The following paragraphs provide a framework for a unified and consistent program for the management and preservation of Pinellas County's prehistoric and historic cultural resources.

The first step in protecting archaeological resources was to survey these resources and to implement a Historic Preservation Ordinance. Pinellas County conducted the necessary surveys and, adopted an Ordinance in 1992 to protect designated historic and archaeological resources. Furthermore, during 1993 and 1994, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners agreed to take over the operation and management of the Weedon Island State Preserve (State-owned property) since the State was considering closure of this resource. This agreement represents effective cooperation between the State and the County for the preservation and protection of significant archaeological resources, helping to achieve multiple historic preservation objectives. The County is preserving Weedon Island by managing it as a natural and cultural preserve.

To promote and enhance the County's Historic Preservation Program, Pinellas County shall continue to provide staff assistance to County residents in Ozona, Crystal Beach, and Palm Harbor areas in establishing new or expanding existing historic district.

The Ozona, Crystal Beach, and Palm Harbor areas are unique and rare surviving examples of small pioneer communities in Pinellas County. The district boundaries of the Downtown Palm Harbor Historic District could be extended to the south, to Wisconsin Avenue. Extension of the southern boundary of the Historic District to the south would take in seven additional historic resources. In addition, the Pinellas County Historic Preservation and Zoning Codes should be considered for amendment to preserve the unique character of Ozona and Crystal Beach communities, which are eligible for national and local historic district designation.

### ***Pinellas County Historic Preservation Task Force***

In 2005, the owners of the historic 1897 Belleview Biltmore Resort and Spa sought to demolish the structure for a future condominium community. From this episode, many throughout the community who have an interest in historic preservation learned that local governments are virtually powerless to prevent a privately-owned historic structure from being demolished; even being on the National Register of Historic Places does not provide protection against the wrecking ball. A debate ensued on the fate of historic structures throughout Pinellas County and how can local governments adequately protect its heritage.

To take a comprehensive look at rectifying the situation, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners adopted Resolution 05-135 that established an ad-hoc, countywide, 15-member Historic Preservation Task Force to study, analyze, and develop a historic preservation program plan for Pinellas County.

The work of the Task Force will culminate into recommendations that the County and the 24 Pinellas municipalities may use ranging from strengthening development codes that would consider protect recognized historic resources to granting tax breaks and other incentives to preserve historic structures and sites. The historic preservation program plan would feature a toolbox of preservation techniques, guidelines, and resources that local governments may consider using with their respective jurisdictions, and an educational component to inform, promote and support the historic resources found throughout Pinellas County.

The following is an outline of the elements of a countywide historic preservation program. The final product will be a consolidated database of historic structures, a report detailing historic preservation criteria and the mechanisms that need to be established or modified to ensure historic preservation is possible countywide, and an action plan for a community awareness programs. Most of this work will be completed by a consultant, which the County Task Force is planning to hire by June 2007.

***Maintain a Common Database of Historic Structures/Sites/Landmarks for all Municipalities within Pinellas County***

- Update current inventory – a multi-year process
  - Review the 1993 inventories and eliminate structures/sites no longer there
  - Add structures/sites considered historic since the last inventory; (i.e.: post World War II)
- Establish a specific criteria for locally significant historic preservation
- Develop a countywide electronic database for ease of update and accessibility.

***Report that Discusses the Mechanisms to Enable Historic Preservation to be Accomplished – Requires Collaboration from all Municipalities***

- Provide technical assistance for individual owners and municipalities including:
  - listing on National Register
  - listing on Florida Master Site File
  - restoration/rehab resources
- Incentive Program for owners
- Continue Save Our Homes with owner change for historic structures
- Regulations
  - Zoning
  - Building Codes
  - Ordinances
  - Historic Preservation Codes
  - Incorporate into county and municipality Comprehensive Plans
  - Incorporate into county-wide and municipality Redevelopment Plans
- Funding – public and private sector

***Action Plan for Community Awareness and Education***

- Establish a website and appropriate links
- Resource Center for citizens
- Establish a county-wide marker program – consider the already established municipality preservation review boards and the county’s historic commission
- Education Programs by established historical organizations and museums in the county
- Networking group of historic preservation professionals in the county

In implementing the Task Force initiatives, Pinellas County set aside \$75,000 to hire a consultant. In June of 2007, the County hired New South Associates as its consultant. The consultant should complete the report in 2008.