



November 13, 2020

Mr. Blake Lyon  
Director, Pinellas County Planning Department  
310 Court Street, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Clearwater, FL 33756

Re: Restoration Bay  
Case Number: Z/LU-14-09-19  
Parcel: 33-30-15-00000-240-0100  
RFAI Response #1

Dear Mr. Lyon:

Pursuant to the Applicant's September 3, 2020, notification, this staff report/comment response letter and the enclosures constitute the Applicant's amended submittal package for Case Number Z/LU-14-09-19. This supplemental filing is in response to the County staff's previous report and comments for this application. It is intended to supplement the Applicant's prior submittal package(s), which remain part of the record for this Application. To facilitate the continued application review and to focus on the specific comments and/or issues identified by County staff in response to the prior application materials, the Applicant has listed below each staff comment and/or issue expressly identified by County staff (in **bold** typeset), with each such staff comment/issue then followed by the Applicant's response:

1. **Staff Comment: The layout of the proposed Development Master Plan substantially encroaches into and is reliant upon development within the 100-year flood plain, VE zones, and all levels of expected storm surge inundation from a CAT 1 through a CAT 5 hurricane. This expressly conflicts with Comprehensive Plan policies restricting development within the Coastal Storm Area and directing population concentrations out of the Coastal Storm Area.**

Applicant's Response: The staff has misstated the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan's Coastal Management Element (Chapter 4), and the Coastal Management Goals, Objectives and Policies related to proposed single-family residential development in the coastal storm area (as specifically defined in said policies). The substantive errors underlying the above comment are numerous:

- (a) The comment ignores the fact that the Coastal Management Element narrative, at Chapter 4-19, expressly acknowledges that **"single-family development" is one of the "predominate land use activities in unincorporated coastal Pinellas County.** . . ."
- (b) The staff's comment (above) presumably is referencing **Objective 1.3** to support the staff's representation that the Coastal Management Goals, Objectives and Policies prohibit such single-family land use in the coastal storm area; however, this comment is misleading and fundamentally incorrect for several reasons:
  - (i) The general concept set forth in Objective 1.3 to "restrict development" within the coastal storm area and to "direct population concentrations" elsewhere, is then precisely defined and qualified by the specific restrictions and limitations of the adopted policies pursuant to said Objective 1.3. The specific policies



(stated below) clearly contradict the staff's erroneous interpretation of Objective 1.3 as a blanket prohibition on single-family development. The fact is that staff's comment does not identify the specific policy which prohibits single-family residential development in the coastal storm area for a very simple reason: there is no such stated policy in the Chapter 4 Coastal Management Element.

- (ii) The comment generalizes the very specific definition of the "coastal storm area" as set forth in Policy 1.3.2.
- (iii) Directly contrary to the prior staff recommendation and the above comment, the adopted policy of Pinellas County **specifically authorizes and allows single-family development in the coastal storm area.** The controlling policy directly on point, **Policy 1.3.5**, expressly states:

"Pinellas County shall not approve any request to amend the Future Land Use Map to designate parcels of land within the coastal storm area **with a Future Land Use Map category that permits more than 5.0 dwelling units per gross acre.**"

Had the County's policy under Objective 1.3 been to completely prohibit single-family development in the coastal storm area, as staff's report and comment erroneously suggest, then Policy 1.3.5 would state that **no residential density (i.e., 0.0 units per gross acre) shall be allowed in the coastal storm area. To the contrary, the County's specific implementation of the general concept set forth in Objective 1.3 was to "restrict" the coastal storm area to allow only lower, single-family density (below 5.0 dwelling units per gross acre) and to "direct" residential densities above 5.0 dwelling units per acre elsewhere in the County.**

- (c) The fact that single-family residential development (at 5.0 dwelling units per gross acre, or less) is expressly authorized by the Coastal Management Element of the Comprehensive Plan is further documented by Policy 1.3.11, also adopted pursuant to Objective 1.3. **Policy 1.3.11** specifically states:

"Mitigation required under Policy 1.3.11 [for coastal storm area residential development] shall not exceed the amount required for a developer to accommodate **impacts reasonably attributable to their development and shall require Pinellas County** and the developer to enter into a binding agreement to memorialize the mitigation plan."

**Obviously, if staff were correct that no single-family development is allowed within the coastal storm area, then no such hurricane shelter mitigation plan would be addressed under Objective 1.3 (the same Objective 1.3 which staff claims is a prohibition on single-family development within the coastal storm area). Simply stated, Pinellas County is obligated pursuant to Policy 1.3.11 to work in good faith with the developer to agree on a reasonable and proportionate hurricane shelter mitigation plan (i.e., either an on-site amenity facility which also can serve as a hurricane shelter or a reasonable contribution by the developer to an existing off-site hurricane shelter which can serve to also meet the development's own specific impacts). The Applicant stands ready, willing and able to discuss with the County and to incorporate such hurricane shelter mitigation agreement consistent with Policy 1.3.11 into its proposed Development Agreement which is a part of this application.**



- (d) As further evidence that the Applicant's position regarding Objective 1.3 is correct, note that **GOAL THREE** of the Coastal Management Element specifically requires Pinellas County to provide adequate public facilities to serve the development and redevelopment proposed in the unincorporated coastal planning area. Moreover, this Goal is then implemented through five (5) specific policies (**Policies 3.1.1 through 3.1.5**). **If the staff were correct that no single-family residential development is allowed in the coastal storm area, then this self-imposed mandate for the County to provide the public infrastructure to support such development in the coastal storm area, would not have been included in the Comprehensive Plan.**
- (e) Finally, it is significant that **GOAL FOUR** of the Coastal Management Element, which sets forth the County's Coastal Land Use policies, nowhere contains any policy which restricts or prohibits single-family residential development (at 5.0 dwelling units or less per gross acre), in the coastal storm area. This Goal Four contains thirty-two (32) specific implementation policies related to the County's coastal development law; certainly the County knew how to include a prohibition upon all residential development within the coastal storm area, if that was the legal intent at the time of adoption of the last Comprehensive Plan. Clearly that was not the case.

Notwithstanding the foregoing Comprehensive Plan policies which clearly authorize and allow the Applicant's proposed single-family density in the coastal storm area (at 5.0 dwelling units or less per gross acre), the Applicant nevertheless has voluntarily revised its proposed Development Master Plan in a good faith effort to respond to staff's comments. Consequently, the Applicant has enclosed a revised conceptual master plan which now provides for a graduated, transitional mix of dwelling lot sizes to (i) provide a substantial building setback buffer between the southern waterfront and any residential dwelling development area, (ii) increase lot size and reduce density in most southern dwelling development areas closest to the southern waterfront dwelling buffer area, and (iii) then transitioning within and from each respective storm surge area and the corresponding Hurricane Evacuation zones to greater density as the project transitions northward away from the waterfront area. Thus, although the overall plan provides for a density of less than 3.0 dwelling units per gross acre (substantially less than the allowable 5.0 dwelling units per gross acre), the revised plan also now concentrates and directs density inland. For example, not only does the plan provide for a substantial (approximately [redacted]-feet wide) voluntary dwelling building setback buffer along the entire southern waterfront area, but the plan then also then provides for lots having a minimum width of 100' in the outer (southern) development edge, with gradual transitioning of lot widths to slightly higher densities moving away (northward) from the waterfront dwelling buffer area. Again, the overall proposed maximum density of 273 dwelling units is less than 3.0 dwelling units per gross acre, which is less than 60% of the allowed 5.0 dwelling units per gross acre pursuant to Policy 1.3.5 of the County's Comprehensive Plan. In addition to the revised Development Master Plan, the Applicant also has included in this supplemental response an illustrative exhibit which graphically depicts this transition of lot sizes/density from larger lots/lesser density nearest to the waterfront areas, with slightly decreasing lot sizes/increasing densities moving northward away from the waterfront.

2. **Staff Comment: While the proposed Future Land Use map designation of Residential Low is generally consistent with the surrounding area, the locational characteristics of the category recognize that the more appropriate designation for areas within the 100-**



**year flood plain is Preservation or Recreation/Open Space and that the Residential Low category is only appropriate if Preservation and/or Recreation/Open Space are not feasible, which has not been demonstrated by the applicant.**

Applicant's Response: As stated above, there is no such policy which precludes residential development (at 5.0 dwelling units or less per gross acre) in the coastal storm area. **Because staff has acknowledged in its comment that the proposed Residential Low FLUM designation is, in fact, consistent with the surrounding land use designations, there is no legal basis for denial of this FLUM amendment.** To the contrary, Policy 1.3.5 specifically requires approval of a density at 5.0 dwelling units or less, and the Applicant through its companion Development agreement has agreed to limit density to less than 3.0 dwelling units per acre, which is only 60% of the Applicant's legal entitlement pursuant to Policy 1.3.5. Notwithstanding the Applicant's legal rights under Policy 1.3.5, and in response to staff's comment, the enclosed revised Development Master Plan contains substantial preservation and open space which fairly address any legitimate "locational characteristics." For example, there are substantial open/recreational space areas provided on all four(4) sides of the proposed residential dwelling area; this amounts to 35 acres (which is       % of the land within the project) of open/recreation space in the locations most consistent with the "appropriate" locational characteristics: (i) adjacent to the Boca Ciega Millenium Park on the west; (ii) adjacent to the comparable and consistent residential subdivision to the north; (iii) adjacent to the comparable and consistent residential subdivision(s) to the east, and (iv) the substantial dwelling setback buffer along the Boca Ciega Bay waterfront on the south. Additionally, the Applicant has met any legitimate request for public open/recreation space through its commitment to provide a 1.2 mile long multi-use public trail which connects to/from the Boca Ciega Millenium Park, extends around the entire project boundary, and connects to the Boca Ciega Bay Water Access/Trail Head. This will ensure that the public has recreational amenity access for everyone, while preserving the private home ownership and security/safety of the project residents whose dwellings will be concentrated in the interior of the property.

Finally, the Staff's comment that a Residential Low designation is only "appropriate" if Preservation and/or Recreation/Open Space "are not feasible," is directly contrary to Policy 1.3.5 (as demonstrated above). The County cannot impose this unlawful, entirely subjective mandate, and the Applicant certainly is not required to "demonstrate" that the resumption of use of the property for the prior (now extinct) golf course use is not "feasible." If it is determined that the Applicant has such legal burden (which the Applicant specifically disputes), then the Applicant in fact can and will demonstrate that the former golf course operation is not viable or "feasible" as a matter of market economics (again, there is no such legal burden upon the Applicant for this proposed FLUM amendment pursuant to the adopted Comprehensive Plan, applicable Florida law, or applicable federal and/or constitutional law. **This is particularly the case now that staff has acknowledged in its own comment above, that "the proposed Future Land Use map designation of Residential Low is generally consistent with the surrounding area. . . ."**

3. **Staff Comment: The RPD zoning district requires that the district be master planned as a creative, walkable and context-sensitive community that responds to the surrounding land use pattern and preserves unique natural features. Therefore, the Development Master Plan should seek to set aside the more vulnerable areas of the site for preservation/open space uses. The current design does not achieve this, nor does it evaluate and compensate for the impacts of future sea level rise.**

Applicant's Response: The revised Development Master Plan in fact provides for a "creative, walkable and context-sensitive community that responds to the surrounding land use pattern and preserves unique natural features." Apart from the fact that this is a purely subjective



criteria that is not legally enforceable, the Applicant nevertheless has provided such plan. As stated above, staff itself has acknowledged that the Residential Low category is entirely consistent with the surrounding areas; consequently, the proposed Residential Low plan category and RPD density (as limited to only 60% of the legal density available per Policy 1.3.5 by the Development Agreement) by definition are responsive to the surrounding land use pattern even without all of the voluntary buffers and public access trail enhancements which has been provided. In addition, multiple design elements have been incorporated into the RPD Development Master Plan to further demonstrate that the proposed plan is creative, walkable, and context sensitive. Furthermore, the only “unique natural feature” on the property is the Boca Ciega Bay waterfront, as the remainder of the property has long-since been altered from its natural state and substantially degraded (environmentally) by the historic golf course use. Clearly the substantial waterfront dwelling setback buffer recognizes the unique natural feature of the waterfront and fairly addresses that feature, as does the provision of the public access trails and trail heads to that unique feature for members of the public. Again, please refer to the revised RPD District Development Plan which shows 35 acres of open/recreation space including the waterfront dwelling setback buffer and the 1.2 mile long multiuse path providing public access from Millenium Park and the adjacent neighborhoods to the waterfront, which was not previously available with the prior golf course use. Finally, as stated above Policy 1.3.11 specifically addresses the mitigation requirements for residential development within the coastal storm area. Pursuant to that express policy, the Applicant is not required to “evaluate and compensate for the impacts of future sea level rise.” Once again, staff is asserting a nebulous, subjective, and undefined criteria which not only cannot be found in the Costal Management Element, but which also is directly contrary to the County’s own mandate in Policy 3.1.11 to limit the Applicant’s obligations to its proportional hurricane shelter mitigation based solely upon the project’s impacts to such required shelter space. Nevertheless, as stated above the Applicant has voluntarily revised the lot size transition to ensure that density is directed away from the coast, and has utilized the waterfront dwelling setback area to protect the most vulnerable portion of the property from storm impacts. Consistent with recent creative design standards adopted by the City of St. Petersburg for its coastal storm areas, the Applicant also is willing to discuss and agree with staff upon appropriate, similar design standards to address the potential impacts of wind, storm surge and hypothetical long-term sea level rise.

4. **Staff Comment: While projected roadway intersection levels of service are satisfactory, the proposed density of the project may alter the roadway classification of 66th Avenue North and creates traffic management conflicts that have not been mitigated by the applicant. The application does not consider unmet area needs of other multimodal improvements in the area (incomplete sidewalk gaps, trail connections) as required by the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan when considering decisions on Future Land Use Map amendments.**

Applicant’s Response: The staff comment acknowledges that the Applicant’s traffic analysis meets the applicable level of service requirements for the relatively minor impact caused by no more than 273 single family dwelling units; specifically, that the pertinent intersections will operate at acceptable levels of service with the addition of the project traffic. The speculative comment that the roadway classification for 66<sup>th</sup> Street may change, or that “traffic management conflicts” might arise, are poorly defined concepts beyond the traffic impact study requirements. Nevertheless, if staff can be more precise as to such perceived issues ,the Applicant is ready, willing, and able to work with the County to better identify and define such concerns, and then to implement any reasonable and practical mitigation strategies through the Development Agreement.. However, the Applicant points out that pursuant to Florida law, the Applicant is only responsible to mitigate the specific impacts of its own project, and is not legally responsible for pre-existing level of service, classification, or traffic management issues, which remain the responsibility of the County or FDOT, as applicable.



With respect to the last comment re: other multimodal needs in the area, it should be noted that the proposed plan does satisfy previously unmet needs by providing a public access multiuse path around the entire development that connects not only the surrounding neighborhoods to both the County park and the waterfront (which was not possible with the prior golf course use), but also connects the county's neighboring Boca Ciega Bay Millennial Park to the waterfront. This certainly does provide a previously unmet need as the public will have access to the trail and the waterfront. The Applicant also has offered to implement practical and feasible streetscape, sidewalk and safer pedestrian access features along 66<sup>th</sup> Street, to which staff previously had agreed as an appropriate mitigation strategy. If staff will identify other specific mitigation measures which are the result of the project's impacts (as opposed to other pre-existing failures/issues), then the Applicant certainly will mitigate them as required by law.

**5. Staff Comment: While the overall planned density of 3.1 units per acre for the entire site is consistent with existing surrounding densities, the proposed plan results in internal and external impacts that conflict with the County's Comprehensive Plan policies and established Land Development Regulations.**

Applicant's Response: The staff comment acknowledges that the proposed density for the project is consistent with the pre-existing, surrounding land use densities. This finding requires approval of the Residential Low plan designation. The vague and unsupported comment that the Development Master Plan somehow conflicts with the Comprehensive Plan and land development regulations is not legally sufficient, without providing a specific basis for such position. The staff has not specifically identified any Comprehensive Plan policies and established Land Development Regulations that supposedly present such conflict. To the contrary, as noted above, the Coastal Management Element Policy 1.3.5 specifically authorizes the single family residential density at up to 5.0 dwelling units per gross acre, and of course the project proposes only 60% of that allowable density, as staff has acknowledged in its comment. While staff has not identified any specific policies or regulations to the contrary, the Applicant points out that the proposed RPD District Development Plan demonstrates consistency with the following Comprehensive Plan policies as outlined in the project narrative including but not limited to:

- Objective 1.16 and policies 1.16.1, 1.16.2, 1.16.3, 1.16.4, and 1.16.5 implementing the Brownfield Program to maximize the beneficial reuse of vacant and abandoned properties in a manner that contributes to economic vitality, community revitalization, community health, and environmental improvement.
- Objectives 3.1 and 3.2 together with related policies promoting balance between development and natural environment.
- Policy 1.3.5 authorizing amendments in the coastal storm area with a FLUM category that permits no more than 5.0 du/gross acre (proposed density is less than 3.0/acre).
- Objective 1.6 encouraging bicycle and pedestrian activity. The multiuse path will allow the area to be accessible to bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Goal Two under Natural Resource Conservation facilitating the restoration of the prior golf course use. The operation of the golf course's historical impacts to the environment will be assess and remediated to FDEP standards. In additional, the proposed layout will provide stormwater treatment before the water reaches Boca Ciega Bay improving water quality.



- Policies 1.1.2 and 1.1.4 of the Housing Element promoting ways to maximize use of permitted densities on vacant residential land in recognition that urban land is becoming too scarce a resource to tolerate significant underutilization.
- Policy 1.6 of Recreation, Open Space and Culture Element to improve public access to County parks and other facilities including County beach access, parks, multiuse trails and boat ramp facilities.
- Objective 4.2 of the Facility Based Recreation Section encouraging the provision of facility-based recreation opportunities, where feasible, by public agencies, private enterprise and private developers.

**6. Staff Comment: When viewed in its totality, the proposed external stormwater treatment (while clearly beneficial to the area) comes at the expense of not setting aside the most vulnerable areas of the property for preservation/open space, and places residential development in these areas instead. On balance, the public benefit does not outweigh the overall impacts of the development and the loss of recreation/open space and preservation uses on the property.**

Applicant's Response: The staff comment acknowledges the substantial public benefit from the external stormwater treatment plan, but then offers the purely subjective opinion that somehow this public benefit "does not outweigh the overall impacts of the development . . ." This nebulous and arbitrary conclusion is not legally defensible, nor does it represent the facts or sound planning principles. As stated above, the Applicant has proposed to utilize over 35 acres of the property for open/recreation space purposes, including the waterfront dwelling setback area to protect the most vulnerable portion of the project, and a substantial multi-use trail around the entire development to improve public access to the County park and to the waterfront (public access which was not available previously and which cannot otherwise be provided by the County). Importantly, these public benefits can be provided in addition to the brownfield and stormwater programs; they are not somehow precluded by the proposed development plan. To the contrary, the proposed plan carefully and creatively locates the low-density residential development in the center of the property, utilizing a substantial dwelling setback buffer from the coastal area and dwelling design standards appropriate for the coastal storm area (see, e.g., the City of St. Petersburg design standards program), provides a smart transition of lot sizes to shift density away from the waterfront, adds multimodal public access to the County park and the waterfront, implements a brownfield program to restore the environmentally-damaged golf course property, and provides the opportunity for on-site treatment of off-site, untreated storm water that has been a chronic historic problem dumping into Boca Ciega Bay. Given these undisputed facts, it is unfair and erroneous to contend that "on balance, the public benefit does not outweigh the overall impacts of the development," especially when Policy 1.3.5 specifically provides that up to 5.0 dwelling units per gross acre are appropriate for the coastal storm area (with no mention in the policy of any "public benefit requirement" which has been manufactured out of less than whole cloth).

Upon your receipt of this response letter and the revised enclosures, we hope staff will be in a position to conclude the review of this project and proceed with the required public hearings. Should you have any questions regarding this information, or require the submittal of additional information,



please contact me at (813) 880-8881. Thank you for your assistance with this project.

Sincerely,

Clark C. Lohmiller, PLA  
Planning & Landscape Architecture  
Group Leader

CCL/lag

Enclosure

cc: File: 00121/2019-0195-00