

Tarpon Springs: A Walking Community

When I close my eyes and envision Tarpon Springs ten, or fifteen years in the future, I see a community growing, alive, looking sparkly, new, but building on its history and roots. A community that is both a home and a destination. Consultant Dan Burden says it pretty well in his 2005 report to the City:

“As Tarpon Springs grows into a diversified, vibrant, self-sufficient place, people will make walking and bicycling an active part of their lives... **Residents and visitors** will have full access to the waterfront. **People will want to live in** and draw from both the preservation and conservation efforts, and the unique character, culture, flavor of four distinct villages that include the Public Service Building, north of the Anclote River, Tarpon Springs historic town center, and the Sponge Docks.” (The bold print emphasis is my emphasis).

Mr. Burden especially emphasized the potential of the Pinellas Trail area. And, were he looking at the community today, I am certain the area south of Tarpon Avenue stretching toward the Sweet Bay Center would be a fifth community.

When Janet and I take visitors on a “Nickel Tour” of our city, of course, we show them all the sites: the parks that so impressed us when we first saw them fifteen years ago, the Gulf Of Mexico and the beaches, the Bayou and its Epiphany Ceremony, the schools and Sponger Pride, the Greek Community, the Orthodox Church, the Africa-American Community and Union Academy Center, the Anclote River and, finally, ending at the Docks for a meal. So much history/culture! So one of a kind! So European in feel! So small town, yet close to so much to do! So easy to get to all our needs (it would be even nicer to be able to walk to all those needs)! So much to build on!

But, we add Tarpon Springs is at a crossroads. It must decide what kind of community it wants to try to be. Does it want to remain the off the beaten path little village it has been in the past? This is, probably, not possible. Or, become another Condo Haven? The answer seems to be a resounding, “No”! Or, will the City leaders come together to lay plans to shape and manage the future direction of the city? The verdict is still out on that question. As the Budget Review Committee looks to future budgets, it has a grand opportunity to urge the **kind of invests** that will make it possible for Tarpon Springs to achieve the above vision. Oh yes, the correct investments will significantly enhance the tax base, and, help pay for themselves.

Consultant Burden’s report is an excellent beginning. Attached are his thoughts on the future of the four communities within Tarpon Springs. I wish you could all see the visuals of what other cities have done. They would really excite you. But, for now, look at the pictures and drawings within the report.

Highlights of his overall recommendations are:

- Complete the sidewalk system
- Green and complete the streets
- Intensify and mix land uses
- Provide right-sized builds. Encourage the developers to build many new affordable units that are well dispersed, properly sized, and scaled for neighborhoods and pocketbooks
- Wayfinding-adequate signs along streets and trails
- Focus on the Pinellas Trail

- All future public and private buildings, streets, ways, and built environments be rated and adopted based on ability to add placemaking.
- All utilities and furniture attractive, decorative, and coordinated, or well screened from common view.
- Children first
- All people of all ages made to feel welcome
- Connectivity: ferries, water taxis, cable boats, and such.

Build it and they will come! Heard that before, right? Build Tarpon Springs for both tourism and **a place to live, with an emphasis on the latter**. Reach out to the educational community: the public school system, and the college to construct a Trade School, and/or other appropriate learning centers here in north county that will train local graduates in the skills needed to attract job producing companies (i.e. energy saving, green product oriented). Build the school and the job facilities so that employees can walk, or ride bicycles, or golf carts to the school, or their jobs. Then, when arriving home in the evening, all of the needs of residents (i.e. food, medical, entertainment, shopping, fix-it, etc.) will still be within easy reach. Build the residential community something like Epcot with a look and feel of the different Greek Islands (i.e. stark white with colorful trim and even label the villages Santorini, Mykonos, or Athens). If our subdivision can be called West Winds, surely others can be designed and named to celebrate Tarpon Springs' Greek, and/or African-American heritages.

There is much more in the report: types of lighting, floating trails, a river walk, colors & surfaces, and a social center. A lot of really exciting, and achievable ideas. This report is too important to simply put on a shelf and draw dust. Please read it over!

Gerald R. Goen

Recommendations

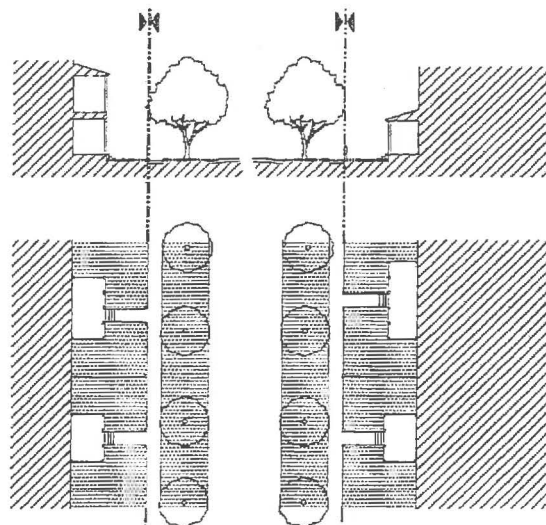
Historic Town Center, Lemon Street. This area has a strong central foundation of many historic quality streets, homes and civic buildings. However, many areas need enhancements. Participants and the workshop team identified these opportunities:

1. Connect (using a “green street”) with Sponge Docks, and provide other connectivity enhancements
2. Provide centrally located transient lodging/ services
3. Improved wayfinding and sitting places
4. Signage controls appropriate to historic charm of neighborhood and central town area
5. Workforce housing (incentives)
6. Wider sidewalks (5 foot minimum) bike paths and attractive bicycle racks
7. Curb extensions (bulbouts) at key intersections and appropriate midblock locations
8. Better marked trolley route and more comfortable waiting stations
9. Incentives for less impervious materials, especially in parking lots
10. More sitting places
11. Farmer’s market
12. Gondola rides on Spring Bayou
13. Embrace density, mixed use development
14. Preserve ground level retail
15. Fine tune roads to be more people friendly
16. Education between municipality and citizens



This zone is applied to areas intended for the most urban conditions within the City outside of the town center. Buildings of up to four stories may accommodate a mixture of land uses emphasizing ground-floor retail with offices and residential above.

Lodging, restaurant, entertainment and civic uses are also encouraged. Street frontages throughout this zone are pedestrian-oriented, and defined by building facades at the back of the sidewalk with all off-street parking provided in structures or located away from street.



Section 5.10.10

Sponge Docks and Connector. This area is characterized by a small working waterfront, and great restaurants. The area is a rich mix of Greek heritage, culture, conversation and sensitive scale Blighted by brutal parking lots and far too much hot sun. The area will benefit greatly through an infusion of walkability, shade and placemaking arts and sciences. New buildings with significant new mixed uses and density will help enliven the area all hours of the day. Participants and the workshop team identified these opportunities:

1. Build and maintain public access to water
2. Provide public restroom, preferably next to a small police precinct station
3. Enrich and protect the rich ethnic and marine heritage
4. Clean up parking lots in stages, first with appropriate landscaping, and then with infill buildings
5. Manage truck traffic
6. Create a new festival street evenings and weekends
7. Provide a strong gateway entry
8. Provide information kiosks and wayfinding
9. Lots more shade and green to enliven and cool the area
10. Better connectivity
11. Preserve and open vistas
12. Sign control and maintenance
13. Water taxis, meals and entertainment on boats
14. Preserve and enhance night view of water
15. Sponge museum at docks
16. Affordable work force housing
17. Wider sidewalks, attractive bike racks, benches and other street furniture
18. Better signs for trolley
19. Mapping and wayfinding
20. Connect docks and dock areas
21. Pedestrian bridge at docks to new area
22. Mixed use with first floor retail



Recommendations



Above Illustrations. Shopfront and Awning style. Façade is aligned close to the frontage line. Use 75% minimum glazing and awnings to overlap the full width of sidewalk. **Gallery Style.** Uses an attached cantilevered colonnade overlapping the sidewalk. Minimum colonnade width 12 feet. Either or both styles can be used along the sponge docks. **Below:** Use of terminating vistas and water features helps enliven the walking experience.



Tarpon Springs Mall Area

Public Safety, Tarpon Springs Mall Area. Location rich. This largely un-built-in infill opportunity has a community center, post office and commercial center. It has vast open lands and is an ideal location to establish a modern mixed use village. Participants and the workshop team identified these opportunities:

1. Hospitality lodging
2. Workforce housing (all sizes)
3. Wider sidewalks, bike lanes and trails
4. Improved connectivity, and improve existing connectivity (wayfinding)
5. Bus transfer station
6. Skate park and other facilities for kids
7. Community swimming pool
8. Focus new village on and around nursing home site
9. Linear park along transit line
10. Improved services for homeless



Recommendations



Target Scenic Views - Focus

Anclote River, Industrial Area, North. This area is has maintained much of its historic charm and character along the waterfront. Special efforts are needed to clean up the area and find complementary land uses, with a strong central village that honors the waterfront and wetland areas. Participants and the workshop team identified these opportunities:

1. Hospitality lodging
2. Public services (fire station, police, public restrooms, plaza, waterfront)
3. Support and maintain maritime industries
4. Provide connectivity to sponge docks (cable ferry, water taxi, other)
5. Preserve waterfront and maintain wetlands
6. Provide floating docks for many uses, including trails
7. Trail on water
8. Preserve industrial areas and control/direct residential infill.
9. Mixed use development, work force housing incentives, senior housing incentives.
10. Enhance night lighting (night sky sensitive)
11. Bus/ferry intermodal terminal
12. Connectivity awareness and improvements
13. Places and activities for children
14. Address building heights, increase residential density, protect and enhance view sheds

Neighborhood General (NG)

The NG zone provides for a variety of residential building types and lot sizes including detached one- and two-story single-family homes, duplexes, triplexes and four-plexes, side-yard housing, and bungalow courts, garden houses, cottages, as well as parks.



Recommendations

