

Appendix A

Short History of Urban Development in Pinellas County, Florida¹

Pinellas is a small peninsula roughly 34.5 miles in length and 5.2 to 15 miles in width. This fact of geography has had a tremendous influence on the history of the County. First of all there are few counties or cities in the United States that are located on a peninsula. Portland, Maine; Charleston, South Carolina; and San Francisco may come to mind, but there are few others. This small fraternity of peninsular counties and cities means that their defining characteristics are shared by few others. For example, the surrounding shoreline helps physically define, and at the same time separate, the peninsula from surrounding areas. The close proximity to the Gulf beaches and coastal waters has made Pinellas County a popular destination for tourists, retirees, and others who value ready accessibility to gulf beaches and coastal waters, or at least a view of these amenities.

Initially, the peninsula was occupied for centuries by Native Americans. The initial European settlers, however, found the Pinellas peninsula to be extremely remote and access was difficult. Farming sustained the pioneers of Pinellas, and water was their only link with what little civilization existed elsewhere in Florida. The first communities in Pinellas, therefore, were located on sites conducive to agriculture and on sheltered coastal areas convenient to boats.

It wasn't until 1887 that the Orange Belt Railroad arrived to end the isolation of the Pinellas peninsula from the rest of Florida. Until that time, the easiest way to enter or leave the peninsula was by boat. The arrival of the Orange Belt Railway, and later the Tampa and Gulf Coast Railroad, along with the dissemination of a leading doctor's conclusion in 1885 that the Pinellas peninsula was the healthiest place on earth, precipitated a movement of people from colder climes to the Pinellas peninsula. Most of these people settled in St. Petersburg, which was at the terminus of the railroad. But in addition to St. Petersburg, other small settlements were established in the peninsula. These were located, with few exceptions, on the coast reflecting their primary means of outside contact prior to the railroads. Examples of these communities include Gulfport (then Disston City), Clearwater, Anona, Dunedin, Ozona, Tarpon Springs, Bayview, and Safety Harbor. After the arrival of the railroads, these communities continued to grow, albeit slowly, and a few small towns were established away from the coast along one of the railroads, often serving as centers for the local citrus industry (Largo is an example).

It is important to understand that, unlike development on the east side of Tampa Bay, which was concentrated around the Port of Tampa, settlement in the Pinellas peninsula was more dispersed since there was no single economic catalyst such as a major port that focused and concentrated settlement in one area. In Pinellas County the economic catalysts at the end of the Nineteenth Century and in the early Twentieth Century were the citrus industry, tourism, and the sponge industry (the latter focused on the community of Tarpon Springs), which allowed for a dispersed settlement pattern among small towns throughout the peninsula. These three elements of the local economy did not depend on access to the urban services provided by large towns and cities resulting in a settlement pattern of dispersed small towns and villages in Pinellas by the beginning of the Twentieth Century. There was no city whose direct or indirect influence was felt through the length and breadth of the peninsula. By the 1920s, the barrier islands began to be settled, their narrow linear geography encouraging several discrete communities including Pass-a-Grille, Indian Shores, and Clearwater Beach. It

was this dispersed settlement pattern that has had such a marked impact on the County's existing urban environment and system of governance. The diversity is seen not only in the variety of communities but in the large number of local governments.

The lack of an adequate road system was a principal cause for the creation of Pinellas County when it split away from Hillsborough County in 1912. The deficient road system was one consequence of having politicians in Tampa making decisions on how to spend tax dollars collected across the Bay. After secession was effected, a road building program during the 1910s and 1920s further connected the numerous Pinellas communities and helped enable them to grow until the 1926 land bust and the Great Depression put a stop to economic growth and noticeably slowed development.

By the time growth resumed after World War II, the economic underpinnings of the local economy had changed. While tourism was still important, the citrus industry was declining and being replaced by retirees and manufacturing as major components of the local economy. A surge of development occurred throughout the County as the numerous small towns and cities established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries began to expand outward eventually coalescing into a large urban area covering almost four fifths of the County at the end of the 20th Century. The residential development consisted primarily of single-family dwellings on separate lots, while commercial development eschewed the historic downtown areas for the new and upgraded roadway corridors. In these respects Pinellas County's development followed a pattern similar to other urbanizing areas around the country. Primarily shaped by the requirements and demands of an automobile-oriented society, Pinellas County's growth and development exhibited characteristics that have come to exemplify Post-WW II urban areas throughout the United States.

The significant number of retirees who moved to Pinellas County in the decades following World War II, have had a tremendous impact on local demographics and the local economy. Those sixty-five years of age and older have represented twenty-five percent or more of the County's population since at least 1960, resulting in Pinellas County having a median age that ranks as one of the highest in the nation. For example, in 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990 the median age of the County's population was 44.9, 48.1, 45.8, and 42.0, respectively. This large retiree population in combination with a healthy tourist industry helped to make retail and services the dominant sectors of the local economy.

The manufacturing sector of the Pinellas economy did not develop to any great extent until the advent of the space program in the late 1950s, when new industry, primarily electronic and electronic component firms, began moving to Pinellas, helping to diversify the economy. Although the manufacturing sector grew steadily during the 1960s, the service and trade sectors continued to dominate the County's economy. The nascent electronics industry of the 1950s has matured in Pinellas County such that 17 percent of all jobs in this industry within the State of Florida were located here in the Year 2000.

The local economy maintained a similar pattern of development throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Many new companies, including high technology firms, were established in Pinellas County or relocated here from other areas. The financial sector, including the insurance and real estate industry, grew to meet the demands resulting from this economic growth and development. The transition from an economic base dominated by the tourism industry and retirees has helped strengthen and diversify the local economy. Additionally,

expansion of the technology and services sectors of the economy in Pinellas has created job opportunities that helped attract large numbers of young working-age people. One result is that the County's median age actually decreased by 3.8 years between 1980 and 1990.

ⁱ For a more thorough discussion of the history of Pinellas County please refer to "Pinellas County Historical Background", Pinellas County Planning Department, Pinellas County, Florida, April 1995.