

**PINELLAS COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL WORKGROUP**  
**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2004**  
**MEETING SUMMARY**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Environmental Work Group:** James Richter, Bill Showalter, Joanne Shrewsbury, Holly Greening, Jason Mickel, Dianne Wheatley Giliotti, Barbara Hoffman, Ellen Pfau

**Pinellas County Staff:** Gordon Beardslee, Liz Freeman, Samantha Shorr-Zigante, Joe Lupardus, Andy Squires, Liz Warren, Bruce Rinker, Leah Hoffman

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Welcome and Introductions

- Gordon Beardslee, Pinellas County Planning Department Administrator, welcomed everyone and began introductions.
- Liz Warren, Director of the Pinellas County Culture, Education and Leisure Department, Joe Lupardus Operations Manager of the Pinellas County Culture, Education and Leisure Department, Leah Hoffman Operations Manager of the Pinellas County Culture, Education and Leisure Department, Bruce Rinker, Environmental Lands Division Administrator of the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management and Andy Squires, Program Manager of the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management were introduced.

Review September 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting Summary

- The workgroup agreed to take home and review the September 9<sup>th</sup> meeting summary.

DVD titled *Partners in Stewardship* produced by the National Park Service

- This DVD exemplified the importance of partnerships between governments and various private organizations to achieve open space.

Review Goals, Objectives and Policies and Make Recommendations

- The workgroup agreed to take home and review the handout titled *Specific ideas from the workgroup for new and/or modified objectives and policies - Floodplains Section of the Natural, Historic and Cultural Resources Element.*

Workgroup Discussion of Recreation and Open Space Element

**Pinellas County Culture, Education and Leisure (CEL) Department**

- Liz Warren, Director of the Pinellas County Culture, Education and Leisure Department, discussed how the CEL Department manages the parks and preserves for the needs of the people and the natural resources.
- The core value of the CEL Department is to provide a place to escape and unwind from the urbanism found in Pinellas County.
- Liz Warren noted that Pinellas County offers a nationally known park system.
- Liz Warren said that the CEL Department has been working on government initiatives for children and obesity and wants to implement health awareness programs.
- The BCC has asked the CEL Department to provide more access to active recreation. So staff has looked into partnerships with the YMCAs, the School Board, the Girl Scout organizations, etc.
- Overall, it's a balancing act as the CEL staff is inundated with requests for different recreational activities.

### **Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management (DEM)**

- Bruce Rinker, Environmental Lands Division Administrator of the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management discussed how the DEM manages the parks and preserves for the needs of the people and the natural resources.
- He said that Pinellas County Preserves and Management Areas are “designated wild areas that are managed for the conservation, protection, and enhancement of natural and cultural resources while providing sustainable passive public recreational uses that are compatible with approved management plans and applicable ordinances and laws.” He suggested emphasis should be placed on what the land can support.

### Active Recreation versus Passive Recreation Uses

- The workgroup discussed the differences between passive and active recreation uses and concluded that clearer definitions for these uses are needed.
- Liz Warren said that the Recreation and Open Space Element of the Comprehensive Plan definitions are the CEL Department’s guiding force. She considers active recreation as highly programmed, scheduled activities (i.e. youth sports) and passive recreation as activities with low environmental impact.
- Bruce said that he thinks of active recreation uses as activities that disrupt the ecological function of the preserves. Bruce referred to Ordinance 02-6, page 7 as defining preserve activities.
- Holly Greening suggested defining the level of intensity of passive and active recreation uses.
- Kathy Durham said the definitions have a grey area; some of these recreational activities (i.e. horseback riding) may potentially pose high environmental impacts to the land.
- Liz Warren said that Pinellas County is not going to build additional active recreational uses in the passive park system; the BCC wants to accomplish that via partnerships instead. The Recreational Reimbursement Program is one way the BCC is providing more active recreational opportunities for unincorporated residents. Under this new service, Pinellas County reimburses residents of unincorporated Pinellas County for any non-resident differential fees they must pay to join any city-sponsored recreational program.

### Dog Parks

- Ellen Pfau expressed concern regarding the environmental impacts of dog parks, specifically the one located at John Chestnut Park.
- Dianne Wheatley Giliotti said that she feels the County may have an implementation problem regarding the placement of dog parks; therefore, tightening up the definitions of passive and active recreation uses may be beneficial.
- Liz Warren said the dog parks are advantageous as they provide places to corral the dogs into one location versus having them run loose in the parks.

### Policy Review

- Holly suggested revising Policy 1.3.6., which states Pinellas County will evaluate the wildlife and habitat value of each of its parks to determine whether there are critically significant habitat areas within the parks, to include a completion date as well as a management plan.
- Leah Hoffman suggested a clearer definition of *critically significant habitat areas*.
- Jason Mickel suggested adding how Policy 1.3.1., which states Pinellas County is committed to linking open space areas and creating a network of greenways and greenspaces, contributes to watershed protection.
- Jason Mickel also suggested adding Florida-Friendly landscape techniques to Policy 1.5.1., which states Pinellas County shall continue to provide educational materials at existing and future County parks.

- The workgroup suggested adding “consistent with Tampa Bay Estuary Program” to Objective 1.8., which states the County shall establish a process for identifying and prioritizing coastal properties for acquisition.
- The workgroup agreed that the County should provide more access to active recreation through partnerships especially with the School Board. The CEL Department staff explained each principal is responsible for his/her own school, which results in after-hour liability issues.
  - However, staff pointed out that the workgroup could help support this partnership by lobbying State legislatures.
  - Staff also noted that there has been a Joint School Board meeting on this as well as a Pinellas Assembly School Task Force Committee that has been established, indicating some progress has been made.
  - Gordon added that most of the municipalities, along with the County, have entered into Interlocal Agreements (ILAs) with the School Board. These ILAs provide the foundation to start working towards the common goal of providing access to active recreation through partnerships.
  - Objective 1.7. and Policy 1.7.5., which both state Pinellas County shall support the development and improvement of recreational opportunities when accomplished in coordination with public and private organizations, are avenues to work through in attaining this partnership.
- Ellen Pfau commented that overall the County should consider implementing only passive/conservative park policies within the Comprehensive Plan.

#### Environmental Sustainability

- Joyce King said environmental sustainability should be applied to the park system, not just to the preserves (i.e. Ft. De Soto birding habitat). She suggested using some of the existing Comprehensive Plan objectives to protect the surrounding wildlife and to help manage the impact of people. She was also concerned about brazilian pepper, asking who is responsible for the exotic when it’s first removed by the developer, but then grows back?
- Bruce agreed with Joyce regarding protecting the surrounding wildlife. He said that national forests have designated wilderness areas, therefore are setting the precedent. Pinellas County should maybe consider setting certain park areas as “off limits.”
- Kathy Durham commented that the Comprehensive Plan should protect land as well as waterways. Both are experiencing overcrowding. There should be consistency when planning developments across jurisdictions.
- Joyce questioned how the County deals with capacity and how the CEL Department works together with the Department of Environmental Management?
- Liz Warren said to meet the needs of the County, the CEL Department listens to the residents, abides by Chapter 90 of the County Code, follows the guidance of the Park Advisory Board, and assesses every parcel of land that comes through for recreational opportunities (approximately half a dozen per month).
- Andy Squires added that each time an opportunity to buy land comes up, they also participate in the evaluation of properties to see if they are needed for an environmental purpose. This is one way the two Departments work together.
- The workgroup agreed that a policy regarding evaluating properties for environmental purposes should be added to the Element.
- Joyce commented that the County should work on fostering a better sense of environmental stewardship in the community through additional education measures. Objective 1.5., which states the County shall continue to develop educational programs and materials concerning the conservation, protection and restoration of resources, provides an avenue to achieve environmental stewardship in the community. The County should also refer to the CEL Department when addressing education in Objective 1.5.

- Liz Warren indicated that there are 55,000 registered boaters in Pinellas County, 35 places to launch and the County maintains 12 of those launches. So when developing individual park plans, the County ensures that there are designated “use areas” to fulfill these recreational needs.

#### Revenue

- In regard to Objective 1.4., which states Pinellas County shall continue to improve beach access to County Parks and other facilities, Joyce asked if the County anticipates any other fees (like the boat ramp parking fee)?
  - Liz Warren said the BCC has asked staff to look at other means to generate revenue in the parks. The County doesn’t receive any of the revenue from magazines, films, etc., done in the park system. There are other vendors making revenue in the parks (i.e. ecotours, kayak tours, etc.). So the County is considering obtaining a special permit, which would allow it to receive a cut of the revenue that these outside vendors are generating in the park system. Also, now if you have over 50 people for an event in the park system, you have to pay a “special event fee.” There are over 400 weddings in the parks per year and over 85 in the Florida Botanical Gardens.
- The CEL Department does have a process to see if the proposed event(s) are invasive to the parks.
- As for charging a park fee, Liz Warren said that neighboring counties use our park system, and legally Pinellas County can’t charge non-residents a fee. If the County wanted to do that, then the County would have to charge everyone a fee including all residents.

#### Additional Items

- Cross Bayou/Joe’s Creek Cleanup flyer for Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Pinellas County’s Greenways, Blueways and Trails Month flyer highlighting all the outdoor events throughout October.
- The next Pinellas County Environmental Workgroup meeting will be held Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup>.

#### Assignments for Next Meeting

- CEL staff will provide the workgroup with some additional information regarding the Brooker Creek land that was sold to East Lake for recreation purposes.
- The workgroup will continue to review the goals, objectives and policies and then let staff know what recommendations they have for the Board of County Commissioners.
- Per the request of the workgroup, staff will discuss the *Natural Systems and Living Resources Section* of the Natural, Historic and Cultural Resources Element of the Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan at the following meeting.

At this point, with no further questions, the meeting concluded.