

City Commission Strategic Planning Workshop
June 17, 2025
4:30 p.m.

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Adrian Petrilă, Mayor
Karen Marriott, Vice Mayor, Commissioner, District 1
Lisa Robinson, Commissioner, District 2
Betty Rzewnicki, Commissioner, District 3
Joe Moholland, Commissioner, District 4

STAFF PRESENT:

Frances Robustelli, City Manager	Devon Schmidt, Finance Director
Ralf Brookes, City Attorney	Camden Mills, Public Services Director
Renee Rose, City Clerk	Candyce Galloway, Chief Technology & Innovation Officer
Marc Portugal, Communications Manager	Mandy Edmunds, Interim Recreation Director
Jim Kilpatrick, Fire Chief	Cathleen Bowley, Interim Library Director
Laura Canary, Community Development Director	

City Manager Robustelli opened the meeting at 4:31pm.

1. PRESENTATION: STRATEGIC PLANNING

Mayor Petrila welcomed everyone. City Manager Frances Robustelli stated the format is informal as this is a one team approach, with the city's top leadership team. She thanked Candyce Galloway and Devon Schmidt, who will also be presenting as both have extensive strategic planning backgrounds. She started with an overview of the agenda in presentation and started with an ice breaker. The presentation is included as part of the meeting record.

Manager Robustelli continued with an overview of each department's recent goals. Each director provided a brief elevator statement about what their department accomplished.

Ms. Schmidt began by outlining the strategic planning process, describing it as a community roadmap that requires both agility and preparedness. She emphasized that strategic planning involves understanding the city's current position, setting future goals, and determining the path to achieve them. Rather than focusing on logistics like meeting schedules or metrics, the goal is to build a system that empowers agency and department heads to set priorities, allocate resources, and ensure accountability, solving real problems and delivering lasting value to citizens. She reviewed the city's highest-ranked priorities and envisioned what success would look like in 3–5 years. Ms. Schmidt also highlighted that the 2022 task list was more of a checklist than a true strategic vision, lacking rationale and aspiration. She noted the December work session as the beginning of a collaborative effort, centered on community needs. Concerns were raised that the current vision statement's values are too vague and undefined, and a suggestion was made to create a mission specifically for the Commission.

Ms. Galloway presented feedback from a recent Commissioner survey, highlighting both areas of alignment and those lacking consensus. Commonly shared priorities included promoting health, safety, and quality of life, providing essential public services, and supporting what individuals can't accomplish alone. She shared strategic insights and a SWOT analysis as a health check of the city's current state. The strategic planning summary identified key aligned priorities: recovery, resiliency, and sustainability; reliable infrastructure; community prosperity; and smart economic development. These priorities included actionable outcomes and real-world examples. The Commission broadly agreed that the city's identity is shaped by its natural assets and residential character. There was strong consensus on five guiding values: fiscal responsibility, resilience, environmental stewardship, community engagement, and service excellence and innovation. The Commission also agreed on the

city's essential services and what internal excellence looks like: cross-departmental collaboration, proactive leadership, empathy, and a unified service culture. Immediate priorities for the next 12–24 months centered on recovery and infrastructure. The session concluded with a group exercise focused on improving alignment around these goals.

Manager Robustelli called for a break at 5:31pm; the meeting resumed at 5:41pm.

The Commission discussion centered on the city's future identity, responsible growth, and how to ensure development aligns with resident needs. Manager Robustelli posed the overarching question of who the city aspires to be, raising the issue of smart versus sustainable growth. Commissioners debated how development should unfold over the next 20 years, with several pointing out that areas like Dolphin Village and Corey Avenue are underutilized and need strategic redevelopment. There was concern about density being disproportionately increased on the north side of the beach, leaving the south side limited in options. Redevelopment envisioned mixed-use buildings, such as shops with residences above, along Corey Avenue to revitalize the area. Commissioners discussed the comprehensive plan, noting that it historically prohibited expansion of density. However, redevelopment could lead to increased density if approached strategically. They discussed the need for updated and accurate traffic studies, pointing out that past metrics were flawed and decisions were made based on bad data. Traffic remains a major concern for residents, and any changes in density should be supported by reliable studies and proactive infrastructure improvements. The real challenge is financing resilient development. Without offering some additional density, developers won't invest in projects that provide long-term benefits to the city. However, many see that no new projects will be completed within the next two decades due to the city's difficult permitting process and reputation as a tough place to do business. It was noted that most permitting delays are often due to incomplete applications from contractors. Development needs to reflect what residents want, and most residents do not want increased density. The city has approved large projects without gaining meaningful infrastructure improvements in return. The mayor emphasized that the city's focus must remain on maintaining residents' quality of life, not just facilitating outside investment. There was agreement that developers who don't live in the city are making decisions that impact the residents who do. It was asked how the city can incentivize hotel redevelopment without increasing density. District 1 isn't impacted by hotel development, but it still faces challenges like empty storefronts, poor roads, and the lack of a grocery store. Increased traffic in that district could be a worthwhile tradeoff if it brings essential services like a grocery store. District 2 would see increased residential street traffic, prompting a discussion that the city should have conducted proper planning and traffic analysis well in advance.

Staff raised the question of how often the city surveys residents. It was noted that every community survey shows strong opposition to more height, density, and traffic. People moved to the area for a certain lifestyle, and many feel that's now at risk. There was a suggestion to focus on creating more green space and parks, rather than large developments, and explore smaller-scale residential projects like townhomes. It was asked why certain properties, like Windward, couldn't become residential condos instead of resorts. There was further discussion about past developments like Tradewinds and Sirata, they offered no real benefits to the community and that developers must be held accountable to contribute tangible improvements. Negotiations need to start at the city manager and staff level, and that if the Commission is united, they can leverage the city's \$200 million infrastructure needs to demand more from developers. If developers are building only what's allowed by right, can the city negotiate? It was discussed that most projects still require something from the city, offering potential leverage. Where is the line between a small business that shouldn't be burdened and a larger business that should be asked to contribute to the community.

Staff suggested approaching planning differently, starting with a long-term vision and then designing backward. Discussion noted the importance of affordable housing, but storms destroyed potential sites.

There was discussion of giving small hotels slight increases in density as a compromise, rather than approving

massive resort-style developments. Staff noted many boutique hotels are locally owned, and the city should be focusing on redeveloping areas like Corey Avenue. Discussion also noted that focusing on residents, rather than just tourists, could help small businesses survive. There are too many vacant storefronts and not enough diversity in its business offerings. The discussion highlighted that focusing on residents allows businesses to be less dependent on tourism. Previously, local businesses offered resident discounts, but that ended, and now many residents shop in St. Pete. There was shared agreement on the need to help local small businesses thrive. The city needs more businesses that offer real value to residents, grocery stores being a key example. Relying only on tourism is unsustainable; there needs to be a diverse mix of businesses.

Manager Robustelli called for a break at 7:02pm; the meeting resumed at 7:08pm.

Manager Robustelli turned to values in practice particularly around how the Commission wants to be perceived by the community and how they work together. She asked how they show up for each other and what commitments they've established for working together. Commissioners agreed that this group goes beyond the routine, unlike past commissions that simply voted on what was in front of them, this commission is willing to engage in difficult conversations and take risks to make meaningful changes for residents and businesses. Discussion included frustration about being insulted and receiving calls from residents who were upset by the way commissioners were treated. Disagreement is expected; it should not be disrespectful. This tone discourages people from applying for commission seats. The workload is already heavy, with late-night meetings. If the commission wants people to step up and contribute, they must set a better example. Manager Robustelli asked if the Commission wants public discourse. Commissioners reflected on how to disagree constructively, noting that even when they don't agree, they generally work well together and represent different parts of the city. Some disagreements can be unproductive and divisive. They encouraged acknowledging areas of agreement more openly to help the public see unity rather than constant conflict. The consensus was that disagreement is natural, but it must be handled respectfully, without making it or taking it personal.

5. Adjournment

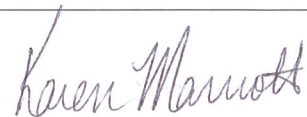
The next Strategic Planning Workshop is scheduled for June 18, 2025 at 4:30 PM.

Mayor Petrilá adjourned the meeting at 7:30pm.

MINUTES APPROVED: July 8, 2025



RENEE ROSE
CITY CLERK



KAREN MARRIOTT
VICE MAYOR