

PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES

June 16, 2025 4:00PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: David Hubbard, Chair
Terri Grocott, Member
Cindy Perry, Member

MEMBERS ABSEBT: Sam Angelides, Jr., Vice Chair
Shawn Rae, Member

STAFF PRESENT: Laura Canary, Community Development Director
Ralf Brookes, Interim City Attorney
Ginny Bodkin, Deputy City Clerk
Gil Martinez, Senior Planner
Peyt Dewar, Code Enforcement Manager

Chair Hubbard called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. Approval of the Agenda –

Member Perry asked to add a discussion item on board priorities (5c.) and Member Grocott requested a discussion on the sign ordinance (5d.).

Motion: Member Perry moved, and Member Grocott seconded, to approve the June 16, 2025 agenda as amended; the motion carried unanimously.

2. Audience Comments – There were no comments.

3. Approval of Minutes – May 19, 2025 Meeting

Motion: Member Grocott moved, and Member Perry seconded, to approve the May 19, 2025 minutes as presented; the motion carried unanimously.

4. Action Items – None.

5. Discussion Items

a. Community Redevelopment Agencies

Senior Planner Gil Martinez reviewed a presentation regarding Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRAs) purpose, statutes pertaining to them, and how they might benefit St. Pete Beach. His presentation is part of the meeting record.

CRAs were established under F.S. 163 as public agencies created by local governments to revitalize areas facing economic decline, blight, or infrastructure challenges to improve physical conditions, attract private investment, and enhance quality of life within those areas. A CRA is established by the local government by identifying an area of blight as defined by Florida Statute. The defined geographic area will be used for tax increment financing. A Finding of Necessity (FON) must be prepared to document the conditions that exist.

Mr. Martinez's presentation showed a map of the area being considered within St. Pete Beach to focus on resiliency and infrastructure. The Planning Dept. and Public Services worked together to define an area that aligns with the city's capital improvement projects, potentially from the Residential, Office, Retail zoning district from the north to the Bayou Residential District to the south. After a FON is completed, the governing body votes to adopt a resolution confirming that the area meets the criteria and a CRA is needed to establish the intent to create a CRA and move forward with planning. From there a Community Redevelopment Plan (CRP) is developed for that area to include proposed projects, funding strategy (typically using tax incremental funding (TIF)), community input, timelines, goals, and performance measures. The plan must align with the local comprehensive plan.

The local government then adopts an ordinance formally establishing the CRA and approving the CRP. The ordinance also establishes the CRA governing board, which may be the local governing body itself (e.g., city commission) or a separate appointed board. Once adopted, the CRA must notify the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) and the county government. If the CRA affects county tax revenues, interlocal agreements are required regarding revenue sharing or terms of TIF use. Mr. Martinez reviewed Tax Increment Financing (TIF) - when the CRA is established, property tax values are frozen at a base year. As property values rise due to redevelopment, the "increment" (difference) in tax revenue is directed to the CRA. TIF revenue is then reinvested into projects within the CRA boundary. The CRA would then be a functioning entity, capable of entering into contracts, acquiring and disposing of property, applying for grants, issuing bonds, and using TIF funds for capital improvements and public-private partnerships. Mr. Martinez asked for board input.

Mr. Martinez explained that the county was previously hesitant to consider CRAs in barrier island communities, but provisions in the criteria now speak to resiliency. Member Perry voiced concerns about tax implications, whether other communities have taken the CRA route, and whether there is already too much going on within the city post-hurricanes to take this on; priorities need to be considered. The previous two times the CRAs were considered did not go through. Mr. Martinez explained that those topics will be taken into consideration as discussions and research continue.

Community Development Director Laura Canary explained that the CRA is a tool in the toolbox, possibly one of the only economic development tools left at the local level. It can be used to leverage and layer funding. She added that the county has changed their delegation criteria for new or expanding CRAs to include whether it is in a coastal high hazard area. She reiterated that this is a preliminary consideration by the city at this time as a funding mechanism to leverage and layer for resiliency and infrastructure needs. The CRA does not initiate any additional taxes; only an incremental value difference would go into the CRA trust fund for that area.

City Attorney Ralf Brookes explained that the CRA does not trump or allow modification to the comprehensive plan; they must be consistent. Ms. Canary added that should this eventually move forward, it would come before this board sitting as the Local Planning Agency when it got to the Redevelopment Plan stage. The CRA would be a mechanism for funding for streets, pavers, sewer, and storm water infrastructure type projects.

Member Grocott inquired whether using a CRA would provide any benefit toward grants. Ms. Canary said it is useful because the blueprint is already there with projects identified. She added that the city continues communications to partner with the University of Florida FIBER (Florida Institute for Built Environment Resilience), using their data and seeking grant opportunities. Ms. Canary added that the City of St. Augustine was able to build a parking garage using the CRA plan.

Ms. Canary stated that staff will be going to the City Commission on July 8th with the scope of services to conduct a FON for their consideration. UF FIBER representatives will be in attendance to speak to the resiliency portion of this proposition. Mr. Martinez will report back at the next board meeting whether other coastal communities have initiated CRAs.

b. Florida Model Lighting Ordinance for Sea Turtle Protection

Mr. Martinez reviewed a presentation to provide an introduction to the State of Florida marine turtle lighting ordinance, including elements that may be appropriate for update of the City's existing 2007 ordinance. Due to significant feedback on the beach ordinance, Staff chose to present the item as three separate ordinances - Ordinance #1: Behavioral and conduct - permitting requirements for public beach solicitors, bicycle-on-the-beach permit requirement, prohibitions on wild bird harassment, etc. Ordinance #2: (Land Development Code) Marine turtle lighting standards for existing and new beach-facing lights, and Ordinance #3: Beach alcohol service and cabanas - location and stacking requirements for cabanas, alcohol service regulations, etc. His presentation is part of the meeting record.

The city's current regulations for marine turtle housing are in Div. 44 of the Land Development Code and pertain to existing lighting and lighting for new development, Div. 44 was adopted in 2007 and contains outdated standards. The FWC (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission) 2020 model lighting ordinance (which was included in the meeting packet) is a voluntary model ordinance to bring communities statewide into compliance with science-based regulations with regulations for lighting (e.g. bulbs, poles, bollards, etc.), pre-vetted equipment and standards (reducing reliance on local evaluation). It regulates new improvements as well as complete sitewide redevelopment and would apply standards to pools, additions, etc. even if a whole property is not redeveloping. The model ordinance specifies standards for visible light transmittance of windows (45% or less) and bulb wavelength (>560 nm), and provides more objective criteria for existing lighting, special events, pre-season inspection scheduling.

The FWC model ordinance does not majorly change existing standards for new vertical development (e.g. new hotel towers or condos); it adds more objective, technical standards for evaluating compliance, including when new accessory development occurs (e.g. parking lots, pools, beach walkovers) and adds specific, vetted standards for bulbs, window film, and other standards where local official knowledge may not be sufficient. Mr. Martinez reviewed the challenges with new development where no dune exists, and existing development.

Following this board's feedback, content, challenges, and solutions would be discussed with the Beach Stewardship Committee - and technical experts when viable. A draft ordinance would be returned to the Planning Board for a vote and finally the City Commission.

Chair Hubbard inquired about the potential conflicts with SB 180; Attorney Brookes explained that this could be adopted as a resolution as a voluntary technical guide to assist property owners with ongoing compliance - i.e. what kinds of lights to buy. It could be made mandatory when SB 180 expires.

Code Enforcement Manager Peyt Dewar explained that the existing code does allow regulation of lighting and infractions are taken to the special magistrate. He spoke about various types of lighting that need updating in the code.

In response to Member Grocott's inquiry, Attorney Brookes explained that the FWC ordinance and manual criteria could be referenced in conditional use permit conditions, should the applicant agree but added that CUP criteria can sometimes be challenged.

c. Priorities of Planning Board (*added*)

Member Perry brought forth items that she believes should be part of the city's priorities. She shared that the City of Treasure Island (effective May 1st) is allowing property owners to voluntarily elevate their land using fill material, making a shift from their previous policy. She displayed their path to resiliency document and environmental sustainability roadmap, which are part of the meeting record. She explained this is an urgent need and used as an example a Pass-A-Grille homeowner who has been told that his garage can only be 16" above the crown of the road. Every time there is a king tide, that would flood. She spoke in opposition to building requirements that put people in that situation. It seems that codes are holding homeowners back from being more resilient. Chair Hubbard indicated he would be agreeable to a workshop on that if necessary.

Member Grocott suggested having the appropriate staff experts review the code for solutions. Attorney Brookes indicated that he could research the code section that mandates that a resident cannot elevate above a certain amount to see if that can be changed or removed instead of mandatory and can report back to the board.

Raising seawalls was discussed and the domino effect. Member Hubbard suggested that the board wait for the results of the current strategic work sessions that the City Commission is engaged in and then confer with Senior Planner Berry to see if there are resulting priorities that the board can work on to address these matters.

d. Sign Ordinance (*added*)

Member Grocott watched the City Commission meetings when this ordinance came forward and heard significant opposition to pole signs. She has observed areas on Gulf Blvd. where businesses are close together and had concerns about the effect on sight lines caused by staggering monument signs. She inquired if any kind of safety analysis been done on that issue and suggested that it should be prior to final reading of that ordinance. Attorney Brookes will follow up with Mr. Berry and the traffic engineers of the consulting group that is working with the city.

6. Adjournment - Next meeting June 16, 2025.

There being no further business, Chair Hubbard adjourned the meeting at 5:04 PM.

These minutes were approved at the August 18, 2025 meeting of the Planning Board.