

# What Residents Want

in Redevelopment Projects



## Introduction

Protect St. Pete Beach Advocacy Group members have had numerous meetings and conversations with residents throughout St. Pete Beach to identify factors that make redevelopment projects true "win-win" situations for our community.

It is not our intent to legislate density or intensity limits during the approval process, nor to dictate to developers how to design their projects.

Instead, we hope to communicate the factors below to all stakeholders so we can seek solutions that work for everyone. Most residents agree that redevelopment and investment are both necessary and desirable throughout our city, and especially for parcels in the Large Resort district.

By setting clear exceptions, our elected officials and city staff can take appropriate action to represent us, instead of corporations whose boards of directors do not live here and who have no obligation to our community.

## Preservation of Existing View Corridors

Current proposals add numerous new structures along Gulf Boulevard at greatly increased density, combining to create an almost continuous barrier of high-rise buildings like Clearwater Beach or Miami Beach. These features contradict our [Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Goal 2](#):

1. They do not maintain and protect the city's residential character; and
2. They detract from the enjoyment of natural resources by physically separating Gulf Boulevard from the Gulf of Mexico, thus blocking breezes, sunlight, the horizon, and beach.

While redevelopment proposals are expected to alter the relative location and configuration of structures, existing view corridors should be preserved to satisfy Future Land Use Goal 2.

## **No Continuous Walls on Gulf Boulevard**

Related to the above, current proposals include multi-story parking garages and resort structures that create walls either directly on Gulf Boulevard or separated by an access road. These walls detract from enjoyment of man-made and natural resources by separating Gulf Boulevard from both the beach and man-made amenities, thus contradicting [Future Land Use Goal 2](#) and violating Future Land Use Policy 5.1.2, "Encourage land development which highlights scenic amenities and ensures public access to the waterfront."

Developers contend that setbacks for walls of varying heights are an acceptable tradeoff and mitigate a "canyon effect". However, the net effect of unbroken walls and high-rise barriers is still the same -- physical separation of Gulf Boulevard from our primary natural resource: the beach and her horizon and breezes.

## **Balance Property Use Between Buildings, Parking, and Open/Green Space**

The current expanse of asphalt parking on the TradeWinds and Sirata properties is unquestionably a waste of space, and a threat to public safety and welfare during flooding or storm surges. Simply building new high-rise parking decks and resort structures on those parking lots, however, is not the ideal solution.

Far preferred are resilient designs that integrate elevated parking into resort structures and reduce impervious surface ratios by converting former parking lots into landscaped open / green space that uses Florida-friendly landscaping to increase flood resilience while connecting Gulf Boulevard, the Gulf of Mexico, and man-made amenities.

## **Out with the Old, In with the New**

Existing structures in both the Sirata Beach Resort and TradeWinds complex are older and beginning to fall into disrepair, thus detracting from the resorts' ability to offer the highest quality guest experience. These structures also lack features necessary to satisfy [Future Land Use Goal 1](#) with respect to energy efficiency, storm resilience, and environmentally-sensitive site and building

design. Therefore, redevelopment proposals should demolish and replace these aging structures, or demonstrate how comprehensive renovation can bring these old buildings into modern code compliance to truly "rebuild" and satisfy [Future Land Use Section C Goal 3](#).

**Public Access Easements Landward of Mean High Water**

Given St. Pete Beach’s historic tradition of public beach access, each Conditional Use Permit should be accompanied by a recognized public easement landward of mean high water to maximize the enjoyment of natural resources by residents and visitors alike as specified in [Future Land Use Goal 2](#).

**Reasonable and Justified Density and Height**

The Comprehensive Plan specifies maximum limits for density and height. Considering the need to maintain and protect the residential character of the City, minimize the threat to health, safety, and welfare, and minimize environmental degradation, it is incumbent on the applicant to demonstrate how the increased height and density is both necessary and appropriate to satisfy [Future Land Use Goal 2](#).

**No Further Increase in Height or Density to Follow**

Should Conditional Use Permits be approved that increase height and / or density, the parcels in question must be restricted from ever having any subsequent increase in height and / or density at any point in the future.

**Respect Resident Beach Access**

Resident beach access should be provided based upon the number of parcels being developed, irrespective of functional consolidation of those parcels. Furthermore, establishment and preservation of those beach accesses should be prioritized throughout the construction process -- beach access paths should be made accessible at the beginning of the construction process and maintained throughout.

**Environmental Protection**

Our Comprehensive Plan's [Future Land Use Element](#) opens with the following mission statement:

*The residents, local business owners and hotel owners/operators of St. Pete Beach, by and through its local government elected officials and city staff, support achieving a sustainable community by: **protecting and conserving water resources**; constructing energy efficient and healthy buildings; **creating environmentally sensitive site and building design**; recycling construction materials and debris; **making building, planning and site design decisions that recognize the complexities and environmental sensitivities of our coastal environment and its vulnerability to storms.***

Our large hotel owner/operators must commit to being partners in conservation, and setting the example for how we can protect our environment and natural resources. Specifically:

1. A healthy vegetated dune system is important to protect public safety and welfare during storms and storm surges, in addition to providing crucial habitat for coastal species. Redevelopment plans should detail how dunes will be protected or improved to ensure compliance with [Florida Statutes Chapter 161, Beach and Shore Preservation](#).
2. Our beaches are hosts to endangered species including Black Skimmers and up to five different species of sea turtles. Resorts developing under conditional use permits should specify policies for how they will help protect the environment for these endangered species on our waterfront. These policies should include guest education, restricting access to sensitive areas, and not leaving equipment or cabanas on the beach overnight. Specific attention should be placed on compliance with St. Pete Beach beach ordinances and minimizing the footprint of disturbed sand.
3. Specific to sea turtles, resorts should ensure compliance with lighting surveys completed by St. Pete Beach Code Enforcement at least two times per year during nesting season.
4. New construction requires that all windows with line-of-sight to the Gulf of Mexico must use tinted glass with visual light transmission (VLT) < 45% in the visible light spectrum to prevent interior lights from reaching the beach during turtle nesting season. All properties developed under Conditional Use Permits should be in compliance with our [Land Development Code Division 44](#) to meet this and related standards.

### **Support for Shared Infrastructure**

Developments of the magnitude proposed place demands on our shared infrastructure that are unfunded by property taxes (which primarily accrue to the state and county) or tourist taxes (which accrue entirely to the county). St. Pete Beach has significant infrastructure challenges today with no clear solution, including:

1. Increasing the number of visitors requires additional funding for law enforcement and emergency medical services. To maintain service levels at current population and tourism levels, St. Pete Beach just added four additional Fire/EMS personnel and two law enforcement personnel. Note that St. Pete Beach Fire/EMS calls have risen from ~3,000 to 4,000 per year since 2016 with an increase in visitors, yet these most recent staffing additions are the first since 2016. The primary challenge to public health, safety, and welfare is maintaining service concurrency as call volumes increase for both law enforcement and emergency services. It is incumbent upon the resorts to maintain the decorum of their guests. Increases in manpower and equipment resources should not be shouldered by residents.
2. While utility undergrounding is currently underway on Gulf Boulevard, these changes primarily benefit resorts and those who frequently transit the Large Resort district. The rest of the island continues to deal with above-ground utilities that are slowly being "hardened", where Duke Energy replaces obtrusive wooden poles with even larger and more obtrusive power poles, all while leaving remaining phone and cable lines on the cut-off original pole. St. Pete Beach desperately needs a coherent plan to relocate all utilities underground for better resilience and aesthetics.
3. As one of the earliest adopters of reclaimed water, St. Pete Beach has an aging reclaimed water system with pipes constantly springing leaks. These high-pressure water jets create springs under our roads, requiring crews to constantly tear up pavement in a futile effort to patch aging pipes. Even worse, we waste a tremendous amount of nutrient-rich reclaimed water, which drains into storm sewers and waterways... feeding algae blooms and red tide that can transform St.

Pete Beach from paradise into a cesspool of rotting fish. St. Pete Beach needs complete replacement of its reclaimed water lines so we can responsibly irrigate our landscape without polluting our waterways and tearing up our roads.

4. The Don CeSar neighborhood has seawalls that are too low to prevent flooding during high tides and even modest rains. As one of the earliest neighborhoods in St. Pete Beach, it needs funding for a plan to cooperatively improve public and private seawalls along with appropriate drainage to reduce flood risk. More broadly across our island, we are looking at needing 30 to 50 pump stations over the next 25 to 35 years according to our Public Works Director.
5. St. Pete Beach taxpayers fund the Freebee on-demand microtransit service, which is free to all and benefits tourists. Everyone benefits from tourists not bringing cars to the island, and more tourists means more demand for the Freebee. The Freebee or similar microtransit service should be supported by resorts for the benefit of their guests.
6. Increasing commercial density in one area of the island increases the value of parks and open recreational space in other areas. Should additional density be warranted in the Large Resort district, one reasonable condition would be funding the conversion of the Corey Landings into a waterfront public park after addressing any necessary cleanup.

The simple facts are that our city does not receive enough of our ad valorem tax dollars back to fund these essential improvements, and **residential taxpayers have been perpetually subsidizing the physical and public safety infrastructure that makes our tourism economy possible.**

According to the [Pinellas County Property Appraiser](#), St. Pete Beach currently contains 50 hotels with 2023 property tax bills totaling \$12.6 million. In comparison, residents pay for 7,317 residential properties with 2023 tax bills totaling \$92.3 million. **Residents pay over seven times more property taxes than hotels and resorts, and it is unfair and unacceptable to further increase burdens on our residents** when we cannot take care of our current infrastructure needs.

Developers might argue that their guests are funding themselves via Pinellas County Tourist Development Taxes. Unfortunately, **nothing could be further from the truth**. While St. Pete Beach is the largest per capita contributor of the TDT / "bed tax", that money goes entirely to Pinellas County. With the exception of recent emergency sand restoration on Pass-a-Grille and Upham Beach, **St. Pete Beach receives no infrastructure support from this funding source**. Instead:

- [Pinellas County is preparing to give \\$300 million of these Tourist Development Taxes as corporate welfare](#) to the multimillionaire owner of a professional baseball team, who lives in New York and is personally worth an estimated \$800 million.
- [Pinellas County is giving \\$25 million of these Tourist Development Taxes](#) for expansion of the Salvador Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg.

The bottom line is that even *if* we pursue overdevelopment in our current framework, we will not dig ourselves out of this hole. Adding \$200 million in taxable value to the Sirata, for example, will only add about \$600,000 in annual tax revenue to the city – an insignificant amount relative to the needs above. We pay too much in taxes, yet too little of our taxes remain here to help us at home. Because of this stark economic reality, the **St. Pete Beach residents cannot afford to continue subsidizing development and the costs of tourism**.

To help us meet these basic needs, we need leadership from our elected officials in St. Pete Beach to bring developers and Pinellas County to the table to find a way to make development and tourism work for everyone.

### **Partnering During Difficult Times**

Replacing obsolete buildings with modern, storm-resistant resorts provides an opportunity for resorts to help residents during inevitable weather-related challenges. It would be ideal if resorts would partner with the community to reserve a portion of their rooms for displaced homeowners for up to 45 days at the federal per diem rate during a state of emergency. This would allow homeowners to remain nearby their properties to coordinate and accelerate restoration following natural disaster.