

CHARLES GAUTHIER, FAICP, LLC

1780 COPPERFIELD CIRCLE
TALLAHASSEE, FL 32312
CHARLES.GAUTHIER.FAICP@GMAIL.COM
(850) 544-8588

February 18, 2024

City of St. Pete Beach
155 Corey Avenue
St. Pete Beach, FL 33706

Honorable Mayor Adrian Pettila
Honorable Commissioner Karen Mariott
Honorable Commissioner Nick Filtz
Honorable Commissioner Betty Rzewnicki
Honorable Commissioner Richard Lorenzen

Subject: Proposed Sirata Conditional Use Permit

Dear Mayor Pettila and Commissioners,

I respectfully submit the following analysis of the proposed Conditional Use Permit for Sirata Beach Resort (CUP #23053, Resolution 2023-21). This item is scheduled for your consideration on February 21, 2024.

The Protect St. Pete Beach Advocacy Group retained me as a land use planner to independently review the Conditional Use Permit because of my 46-years of experience within Florida. I have worked with local governments throughout the state on growth and development issues. My vita is attached.

1. Sirata Request

The applicant is requesting approval to construct two new hotels on an 8.62-acre buildable area resulting in 646 total units and 49,282 square feet of floor area.

- The northern hotel would be a 290-unit, 10-story structure with a height of 127.5-feet above base flood elevation including rooftop features. Outdoor dining and drinking with outdoor music would be allowed on a fourth-floor pool deck.
- The southern hotel would be a 130-unit, 8-story structure with a potential height of 100.5-feet above base flood elevation with rooftop features.
- The site would be served by parking garages facing Gulf Boulevard.
- The existing Sirata Beach Resort would be remodeled and remain at 8-stories (73-feet).

- Additionally, floor area for non-lodging purposes would be increased to 49,282 square feet.

In sum, the Sirata proposal would maximize the number of transient lodging units by increasing the existing 382-units to 646-units. The 69% increase would result in 74.9 units per acre which is at the top of the potential density. Additional floor area would be increased by 10% to 49,282 square feet. For reference that equates to the scale of a community supermarket.

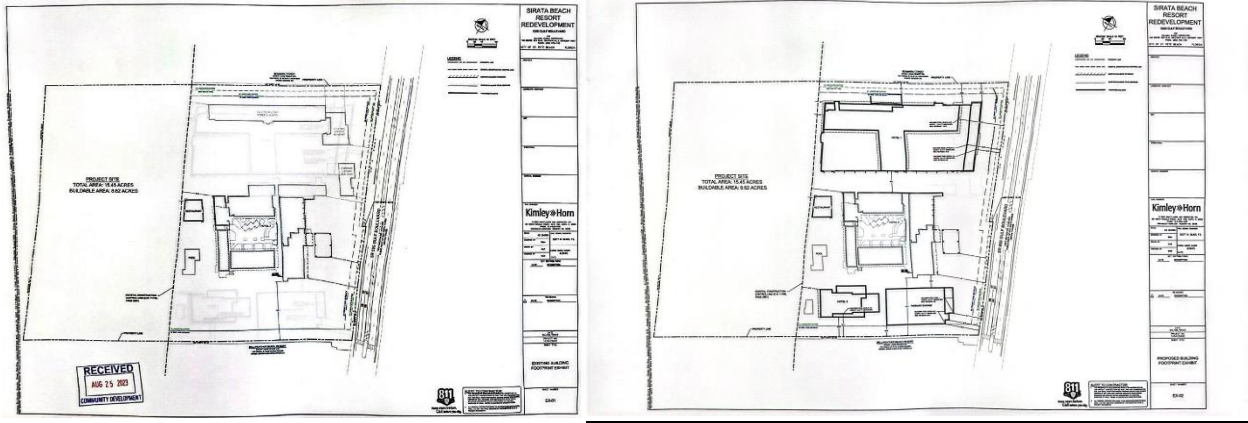


Existing Sirata Beach Resort

Instead of a single, integrated large resort the Sirata proposal is better characterized as three hotels on a single property.



Sirata Proposed Development



Existing and Proposed Development Footprint

2. Summary of Opinion

The St. Pete Beach City Commission should deny the application based on inconsistency with the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code for the following reasons:

- As a result of its scale, building height and site design the proposed development clashes with the community character of St. Pete Beach;
- Maximum redevelopment of the site would result in incompatible impacts on adjacent and nearby residential uses; and,
- The proposed Conditional Use Permit would authorize overdevelopment of a vulnerable site subject to coastal storm hazards.

3. Challenges of Redevelopment within the Large Resort Future Land Use District

The redevelopment of aging hotel facilities is an important goal for St. Pete Beach. While redevelopment opportunities are welcome, a balance must be achieved which maintains community character, avoids or minimizes compatibility impacts and protects established community interests. The Sirata proposal maximizes redevelopment to the extent that it is out of balance with community interests.

The maximum numeric development potential associated with the Large Resort District is not guaranteed and must be considered in the context of the overall goals, objective and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and review criteria in the Land Development Code.

To be consistent means the land uses, densities or intensities, and other aspects of development are compatible with and further the objectives, policies, and uses, and densities in the Plan and if the development order meets all other criterial enumerated by the local government.¹

¹ Section 163.3194(3)(a), Florida Statutes

Comprehensive Plan Policy 15(b) addresses the purpose and intent of the Large Resort District including the following:

It is the goal and intent of the City to limit height and density in this District to the minimum that will provide comparatively equal market value between multi-family residential use and temporary lodging use for the reasons discussed below.

I am unaware of an analysis demonstrating the height and density proposed by Sirata is based on a comparatively equal market value with multifamily development. Note too that the underpinnings for this requirement, and potential transient unit density within Large Resort, are based on data from 2007. Economic conditions have not remained static over the past 17-years.

The Comprehensive Plan requires that Sirata obtain a Conditional Use Permit since the applicant seeks building heights of greater than 50-feet and a density of greater than 30 Temporary Lodging Units per acre.² The Land Development Code provides that certain uses are conditional rather than by right because they may have significant adverse effects on the environment, public services, and on the desired character of an area or they may create nuisances.³

4. Critical Review Issues

A. Precedential Value and Cumulative Impacts

The Sirata proposal and a proposed Conditional Use Permit for Tradewinds Islands Resort which is due to be considered at a future date, constitute about half the acreage in the Large Resort Future Land Use District. These are highly significant redevelopment proposals which will lock in the pattern for redevelopment for the Gulf Boulevard Large Resort District.

As such, St. Pete Beach should consider the cumulative impacts of a development scenario where all of the Large Resort District maximizes transient unit density as being requested by Sirata with particular attention to:

- Daily and peak weekend traffic conditions and pedestrian safety;
- Beach crowding and sea turtle protection;
- Adequacy of existing water, sewer and drainage facilities;
- Public safety including police, fire, emergency medical and storm evacuation; and,
- Impact on community character and quality of life.

² Section (c), Standards for the Community Redevelopment District

³ Section 4.1, LDC

A cumulative analysis would allow the city to manage redevelopment to an appropriate level so as to not unreasonably impact community character, compatibility, infrastructure and public services to a degree detrimental to the public's health, safety and welfare.

B. Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is replete with requirements to protect community character and ensure compatibility:

- Section 1 of the Plan identifies ten important factors for community redevelopment based on existing conditions and on resident input. These factors, also described as principles, include:

(2) There is strong community objection to high density unmanaged overdevelopment of our coastal Gulf community that will further degrade infrastructure and public services.

- The Plan must be read in the context of community objection to high density unmanaged overdevelopment.

(3) There is a strong desire to protect the quiet character of existing residential neighborhoods from encroachment and overdevelopment of non-residential units.

- Further the Plan emphasizes maintaining and protecting the community character of St. Pete Beach. That is the overriding requirement of Future Land Use Goal 2.

The City shall ensure that the residential character of the City of St. Pete Beach is maintained and protected while:

- *Maximizing the potential for economic benefit resulting from the tourist trade and the enjoyment of natural and man-made resources by residents and visitors alike.*
- *Minimizing the threat to health, safety, and welfare posed by hazards, nuisances, incompatible land uses, and environmental degradation.*
- *Maintaining the community's recreation, open space and beaches.*

- Future Land Use Objective 2.1 requires that the integrity of life throughout the City will be maintained.

The integrity and quality of life throughout the City, including existing residential neighborhoods, as well as core commercial and resort areas, will be maintained through the enforcement of the land development regulations and shall be encouraged to be improved, and for those properties experiencing blighting conditions such as deterioration, degradation, and distress shall

be encouraged to redevelop through the use of land development regulations and other incentives, in accordance with the Future Land Use Element.

- Future Land Use Policy 2.1.5 requires protection of existing residential areas.

Through the enforcement of the land development regulations, existing residential areas shall be protected from the encroachment of incompatible uses; likewise, other land use areas shall be protected from the encroachment of incompatible residential uses.

- Future Land Use Objective 2.4 further requires enhancement and protection of the City's character.

Consistent with this comprehensive plan, as amended, the City of St. Pete Beach shall enhance and protect the City's character through the encouragement of redevelopment which ensures an orderly and aesthetic mixture of land uses.

- Future Land Use Objective 5.1.3 requires that land development regulations recognize the limitations of development on a barrier island including vulnerability to tropical storms.

The City shall adopt and implement land development regulations which recognize the limitations of development on a barrier island, including its location in the 100-year flood plain, its vulnerability to tropical storms, and its topography and soil conditions.

C. Land Development Code

Sec. 4.4. Standards for review.

(a) Standards applicable to all conditional uses. When considering an application for approval of a conditional use, the city commission review shall consider the following standards:

- (1) Whether the conditional use is consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan, any adopted special area plan and these regulations;*
- (2) Whether the proposed use will be compatible with the character of the existing area, including existing structures and structures under construction, existing public facilities and public facilities under construction, and residential, commercial and/or service facilities available within the existing area. More specifically:*
 - a. Whether the overall appearance and function of the area will be significantly affected consideration shall be given to the existence*

- of other uses in the area, based on the number, size, and location of the uses and the intensity and scale of the proposed and existing uses in the area;*
- b. Whether the application will preserve any city, state or federally designated historic, scenic, archaeological, or cultural resources;*
 - c. Whether the application will be compatible with adjacent development, if any, based on characteristics such as size, building style and scale; or whether such incompatibilities are mitigated through such means as screening, landscaping, setbacks, and other design features; and*
 - d. Whether the application will have significant adverse impacts on the livability and usability of nearby land due to noise, dust, fumes, smoke, glare from lights, late-night operations, odors, vehicular traffic, truck and other delivery trips, the amount, location, and nature of any outside activities, potential for increased litter, or privacy and safety issues.*
- (3) Whether the transportation system is capable of adequately supporting the proposed use in addition to the existing uses in the area. Evaluation factors include street capacity and level of service, access to arterials, transit availability, on-street parking impacts, if any, site access requirements, neighborhood impacts, and pedestrian safety;*
 - (4) Whether the minimum off-street parking area required and the amount of space needed for the loading and unloading of trucks, if applicable, will be provided and will function properly and safely;*
 - (5) Whether generally, the public health, safety and welfare will be preserved, and any reasonable conditions necessary for such preservation have been made;*
 - (6) Whether the applicant has demonstrated the financial and technical capacity to complete any improvements and mitigation necessitated by the development as proposed and has made adequate legal provision to guarantee the provision such improvements and mitigation; and*
 - (7) Whether the proposed use complies with all additional standards imposed on it by the particular provision of these regulations authorizing such use and by all other applicable requirements of the regulations of the City of St. Pete Beach.*

Sec. 39.8. – Design, scale and mass of buildings

- (a) No plane of a building may continue uninterrupted for greater than 100 linear feet. For the purpose of this standard, "interrupted" means an offset of greater than five feet.*

- (b) At least 60 percent of any elevation will be covered with windows or architectural decoration. For the purpose of this standard, an elevation is that portion of a building that is visible from a particular point outside the parcel proposed for development.*
- (c) The height and mass of buildings will be correlated to: (1) the dimensional aspects of the parcel proposed for development and (2) adjacent public spaces such as streets and parks.*
- (d) Buildings may be designed for a vertical or horizontal mix of permitted uses.*

D. Development Design and Community Character

The Large Resort District allows for intensive redevelopment with transient lodging unit densities of up to 75 units per acre, building heights of up to 116-feet above base flood elevation and as little as 15% impervious surface. Taken to its maximum, this is a formula for tightly packed site development with shoulder-to-shoulder eight and ten-story buildings and parking garages.

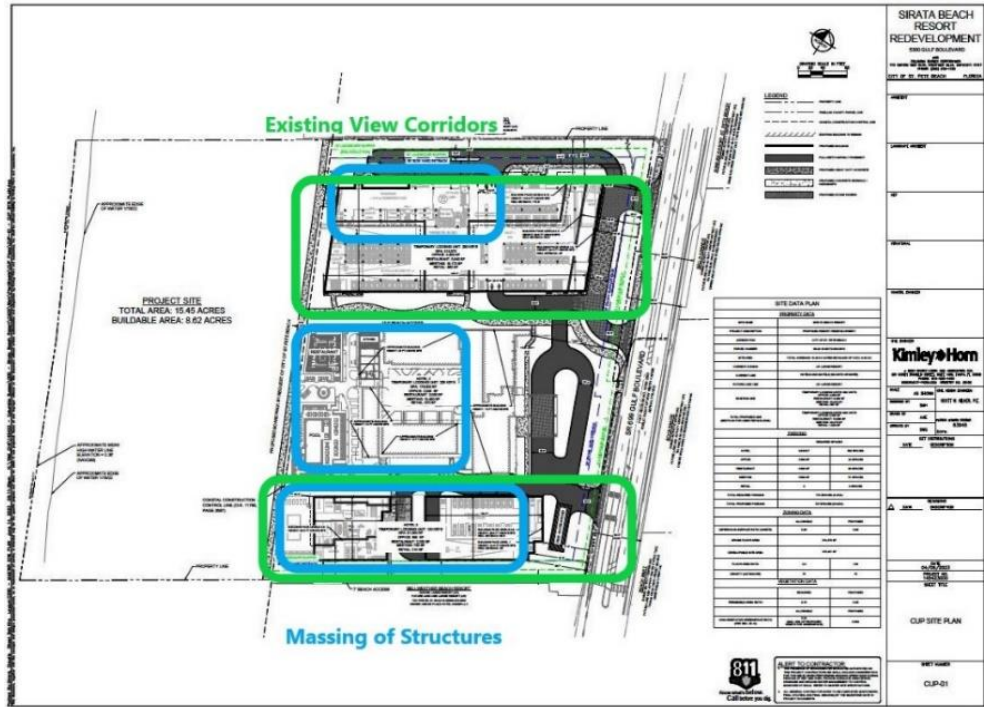
The compression of significant amounts of development in a confined area with limited impervious surface is common in central business districts of large cities such as downtown Tampa, Orlando and Miami. It is also seen in a linear form in beachfront settings such as Panama City Beach, Clearwater Beach and South Florida.

However, it is not consistent with the development pattern in St. Pete Beach which is known for its exceptionally high quality residential areas and mix of small-scale community commercial uses and low and mid-rise hotels with periodic larger buildings.

The City Commission must decide if this development proposal which essentially creates a wall of tall buildings resembling beachfront development in Panama City Beach, Clearwater Beach and South Florida, is consistent with the character of St. Pete Beach.

The excessive massing of development is evident in the site plan which shows that the northern hotel has an architectural plane width of 196.6-feet and a depth of 430-feet and the parking garage by the southern hotel has a plane of 106-feet by 197.7-feet which appears to conflict with Sec.39.8(a) of the Land Development Code which limits uninterrupted planes to no greater than 100-feet.

The Sirata proposal exemplifies the consequences of maximizing redevelopment in a tightly packed site, massing of tall buildings and extremely limited impervious surface.



Massing of Buildings, Loss of View Corridors

E. Compatibility with Adjacent and Nearby Land Uses

The Sirata portion of the Large Resort District is adjacent to and in close proximity to residential uses resulting in negative effects including degradation of sense of place, adverse visual impacts, loss of privacy, noise from site operations and outdoor entertainment, additional traffic, pedestrian and bicycle safety, beach crowding.

Compatibility is defined in the Florida Statutes as:⁴

“Compatibility” means a condition in which land uses or conditions can coexist in relative proximity to each other in a stable fashion over time such that no use or condition is unduly negatively impacted directly or indirectly by another use or condition.”

There is no question that the overall appearance and function of the area would be significantly affected. Adjacent and nearby residences would be impacted.

Land use compatibility is often a qualitative analysis based on existing land uses and the proposed development. Experience has taught me to move conservatively and prioritize protection established residential uses. Public comment is very important for you to consider when weighing compatibility issues, after all, it is the public whose welfare you are to protect.

⁴ Subsection 163.3164(9), Florida Statutes



Sirata and Adjacent and Nearby Residential Use

Residential Land Use Most Impacted by Sirata Proposal			
Community	Residences	Type	Distance
Seamark	106	10-story Condominium	Adjacent
Bella Grande	28	(2) 6-story Condominiums	100-feet
Boca Sands	65	(2) 6-story Condominiums	100-feet
Punta Vista Drive	27	Single Family	300-1,200 feet
Aloha Street	16	Single Family	560-1,100 feet
55 th Street Neighborhood (in addition to Aloha Street)	86	Single Family	
Total	328		

F. Gulf Boulevard Access

Large Resort land use district covers about 65-acres along a 0.9-mile length of Gulf Boulevard. As you know, this stretch of Gulf Boulevard is the single north-south road in this area. There is not an alternative parallel route for residents, visitors or business. All traffic must ingress and egress directly onto Gulf Boulevard. Thus the entire community is affected by increased traffic.

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February 18, 2024

I will defer to Mr. Drew Roark, P.E., for his analysis of the applicant's transportation study and impacts of the proposed 69% increase of transient lodging units on Gulf Boulevard.

G. Coastal High Hazard Area

St. Pete Beach is highly vulnerable to coastal storms, wind damage and salt water surge. According to storm surge modeling the Large Resort District may be subject to salt water inundation even in a Category 1 storm event.

It is not just the threat of coastal storms; sea level rise profoundly changes the planning equation for St. Pete Beach. Pinellas County has published the following finding about potential sea level rise:

Based upon a thorough assessment of scientific data and literature on SLR, the Tampa Bay Climate Science Advisory Panel (CSAP) concludes that the Tampa Bay region may experience SLR somewhere between 11 inches to 2.5 feet in 2050 and between 1.9 to 8.5 feet in 2100.⁵

Consistent with Future Land Use Objective 5.1.3, I recommend the City Commission resist pressures seeking to maximize redevelopment which places people and property in harm's way.

5. Conclusion

The City of St. Pete Beach's goal of redeveloping its Large Resort Future Land Use District does not necessitate the maximization of development as proposed here. The Sirata proposal clashes with community character and would result in adverse impacts on adjacent and nearby residential uses. Additionally, maximum redevelopment is inappropriate in an area vulnerable to destruction by the forces of nature.

In my professional opinion it is in the City of St. Pete Beach's best interest to deny the proposed Sirata Conditional Use Permit for the reasons discussed above.

Sincerely yours,



Charles Gauthier, FAICP

⁵ <https://floodmaps.pinellascounty.org/pages/sea-level-rise>

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February 18, 2024

CC JoLynn Lawson, Protect St. Pete Beach Advocacy Group
Jane Graham, Esq.
Wayne Saunders, Interim City Manager
Andrew Dickman, City Attorney
Amber Larowe, City Clerk
Brandon Berry, Planner

Vita
Charles Gauthier, FAICP

I have worked in Florida for over 46-years as a professional planner in the areas of growth management, land use planning, environmental planning, land use regulation, zoning, and site planning. I have been a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners since 1988; in 2011, I was inducted as a Fellow for outstanding contributions to the public interest the highest achievement available at a national level.

At the local level of government, I served as Chief of Long-Range Planning for Collier County during preparation of the 1989 Growth Management Plan. As Lee County's Zoning Manager, I presented over 300 re-zoning requests to the Board of County Commissioners. For 17-years I served as a senior state official with the Florida Department of Community Affairs overseeing local government implementation of comprehensive planning, large-scale development, and land development regulation throughout Florida. During my career I have worked for major consulting firms representing both governmental and developmental interests.

In 2014, I started my own practice with the goal of using my knowledge, skills and experience to serve the public interest by providing expert planning services to public and private sector clients. My clients have included a diversity of interests including local governments, business, public interest groups and private individuals.

