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## ***Integrating Plans and Opportunities Successfully into the Surrounding Environment***

The success of the Gateway Area depends on more than projects; it depends on successful integration of the plans and projects into the surrounding natural and community environment. The desire to maximize the economic and employment potential of the Gateway Area cannot be at the expense of the natural surroundings, nor should it jeopardize financial commitments made by the County to the protection of the Gateway Preserve, or the County's upcoming commitments to watershed restoration and management.

Additionally, planning for the Gateway Area must recognize existing neighborhoods - Gateway is home and community to many people. The residential land uses contribute to both the vitality and diversity of the Gateway Area. Consequently, County projects and plans must be sensitive to neighborhood concerns and needs. For example, residents both in and outside of the Gateway Area have expressed concern over plans to expand Airport operations, particularly in regard to noise levels. Concerns such as these require creative and ongoing planning to resolve.

The following details provide further description and context to these types of concerns and relate natural surroundings and quality of life to the planning process for the Gateway Area.

### **■ ■ *Natural Resource Protection and Public Use Opportunities***

The Gateway Area contains at least two significant environmental features, the approximately 1,600 acre Gateway Preserve and the Cross Bayou Canal. The Gateway Preserve is a part of the County's network of managed environmental lands, managed by the Environmental Lands Division of the Pinellas County Department of Environmental Management. It is unique in that it was the first large environmental investment by the County for natural resource protection. Today, the Preserve is managed by the County for its significant regional habitat value and for its contribution to the overall goals of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. The Preserve was recently annexed by the City of St. Petersburg.

The Cross Bayou Canal bisects the County, and is navigable in portions. Off and on, the Canal has been the subject of discussion by the County as a possible canoe trail, or blueway. However, for several reasons, including security issues associated with the proximity to the Coast Guard Facility and the Black Hawk Training Facility, it has been difficult to advance a plan for such a use. Regardless, the Cross Bayou Canal remains a significant environmental feature in the Cross Bayou Watershed and water quality issues have contributed to its priority in the County's watershed planning program. Watershed diagnostics and planning are currently underway by staff from the County, the City of Largo, the City of Pinellas Park and the Southwest Florida Water Management District. The Cross Bayou watershed management initiative recently received a designation by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Land

Revitalization/One Clean-up Pilot Program which will provide financial support for the County's watershed management and land revitalization goals. Additionally, the EPA recently awarded the County an environmental assessment grant complementing the Cross Bayou designation. This designation goes hand-in-hand with the County's brownfield initiative, and the program components of both can be applied throughout the watershed to achieve watershed improvement and County redevelopment goals.

The Gateway Area is also home to significant cultural resources and was the site of a major archaeological excavation, the Yat Kitischee site, in the 1990s in the proximity of the Airport. Protection of the Yat Kitischee site and its resources as a reflection of Pinellas County's past remains important to the County. The Yat Kitischee site is currently protected, but it is likely that archaeological resources are located on other properties in the vicinity. The Airport completed an archaeological assessment of the area in 2005 and additional protection measures might be worthwhile and appropriate.

### ***Incorporating Environmental Protection into the Planning Process***

Protection of the natural resources in the Gateway Area should be a priority as the County has invested significant time and dollars towards the creation, development and management of the diverse and dynamic coastal preserve system represented by the Gateway Preserve, and Weedon Island to the south. The Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan recognizes, and commits to, the value of using environmental lands for education and public enjoyment in a manner that instills environmental stewardship. The wise integration and enhancement of the environment into the planning for Gateway, and representing the preserve lands as an integral feature of the Area, is key to ensuring stewardship for the surrounding natural environment. Planning for public access to the natural lands, therefore, is essential, even if access is largely by kayak or canoe.

Road planning, redevelopment planning and site planning present the opportunity for incremental environmental improvement. For example, exploring creative regulatory and funding strategies and priorities for beautification, habitat restoration and landscaping will contribute positively to the character and environmental value of the Area. Planning for road improvements can offer, for example, the opportunity to enhance the aesthetics and environment along the roadway corridor.

The Gateway Area is situated predominantly in the Cross Bayou and Roosevelt drainage basins. Consequently, long range planning for the Gateway Area needs to recognize specific watershed issues and must contribute to watershed improvement. For example, multi-jurisdictional watershed planning for improvements in the Cross Bayou Basin is underway (as previously described) between the County, the cities of Largo and Pinellas Park, and SWFWMD. In both watersheds, the issues to be addressed include compliance with the water quality improvement aspects of the County's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit and importantly, compliance with new surface water quality standards regarding maximum allowable pollutant loads (i.e., total maximum daily loads, or TMDLs). The Roosevelt Basin in particular drains to Tampa Bay, a National Estuary, which is a priority waterbody for