

## ■ *Future Plans and Opportunities* ■

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### *Supporting Economic and Employment Potential with County Projects and Plans*

Integral to achieving the maximum potential of the Gateway Area is a comprehensive planning approach that recognizes the diversity of uses and activities in the Gateway Area and seeks logical connections among and between those uses and activities. With sound planning, the County has the ability to use County-owned properties to help fill the gaps in needed or desirable services and uses, and to create the synergistic relationships with area businesses, industries and governments that will position the Gateway Area for successful local, regional, national and international interaction. With the same confluence of conditions that first set the Area apart for its economic and employment potential thirty years ago still in place today, and with significant development activity still underway, the Gateway Area is already a diverse and dynamic employment center of the County. How then to make it better? The evaluation of the County-owned properties in the area, particularly those that might be underutilized from a contributory economic and employment perspective, is critical to this question.

Maximizing the employment potential of the Area requires attracting and retaining businesses and industries. How does this impact the transportation network, and the ability to effectively manage traffic carrying capacity of the major roadway system? How will development and redevelopment affect the natural environment? How do we ensure that planning for new opportunities is compatible with the need to plan and fund needed support facilities and services? And finally, how do we make sure that the quality of life for Gateway Area residents remains protected, and even enhanced, by implementing a long range plan for the Gateway Area? To answer these questions requires that we have well-thought-out plans and policies to guide critical future decisions. The following discussion explores the potential for County projects, properties and planning in the Gateway Area to impact and influence the goals and outcomes for the Gateway Area.

### ■ ■ **Recreational Plans and Opportunities**

The most significant recreational opportunity located in the Gateway Area, and perhaps for the County as a whole, is associated with property under Pinellas County Utilities/Solid Waste Operations ownership. The **241 acre closed Toytown landfill** is one of the few large properties not yet committed for a specific development (**see Figure 2**). Particularly if associated with adjacent privately-owned property, creative multi-use recreational opportunities exist at this location. However, since it is a closed landfill, any future development for a public use, including a recreational use, must be planned to address the physical, environmental and permitting limitations imposed by the site characteristics. With the County's build-out condition, opportunities to purchase or develop vacant tracts of this size are rare. But a tract of this size is required if the County is going to plan for any sort of regional recreational venue. Recreational

planning has taken on increased importance in the past few years with the completion of the Active Recreation for Pinellas County Residents report in 2002, resulting in the current recreational master planning process underway. Use of the Toytown property for recreational purposes was discussed in that report, recognizing that the size and contiguity of the property presented significant opportunity. The proximity of the property to the planned Progress Energy Trail alignment of the Pinellas Trail provides further value to the location as an accessible recreational hub. In addition, the fact that the property is centrally located with major roadway access in all directions makes it desirable for the types of regional recreational uses that benefit local residents, as well as the local economy by attracting recreational enthusiasts at both regional and national levels to Pinellas County. For these reasons, a study of the recreational potential of Pinellas County Utilities' Gateway Area properties is being undertaken. This scale of recreation does not necessarily address community-level recreation needs, requiring that the County continue to plan at a community-level, even while devising a regional plan for recreational and economic success. In fact, a recreational survey has been devised for the Highpoint area to gauge recreational interests.

As mentioned above, the **Progress Energy Right-of-Way/Easement** is currently under consideration as an eastern alignment of the Fred E. Marquis Pinellas Trail. Recently, a lease agreement was completed between the County and Progress Energy allowing for co-location of the Trail along the powerline alignment. Currently, construction of the portion of the Trail north of Ulmerton Road is planned to begin in 2006 using Penny for Pinellas dollars. The County has received approval and allocation of Federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funding to complete overpasses. Portions of the project have been scheduled by the MPO and put into the FDOT work program. The southern alignment in the vicinity of the County's Bridgeway Acres landfill will still need to be worked out with Solid Waste/Utilities and environmental permitting officials. An alignment to connect the Progress Energy Trail with the closed Toytown landfill property, a potential future recreational venue, is under consideration in association with the mixed use development project planned in proximity to the County's Solid Waste Operations; however, there are no final plans. The Pinellas County Comprehensive Plan requires bicycle lanes and sidewalks to be included along with any County roadway construction projects in the Area. Ongoing attention to bicycle facilities planning and safety in the Gateway Area is important, not only from a recreational, but also a transportation perspective, as the Area matures and integrates as a residential and employment center.

The **Gateway Preserve** is over 1600 acres of County-managed preserveland. While the Preserve is largely wetland, there may be the potential for some trail development, including a "blueway," or canoe/kayak trail destination. However, the site constraints are significant for public access as very little of the land is upland. Still, the Preserve is an integral and defining environmental feature of the Gateway Area and must be considered in the County's long range planning.