

Dear Mr. Parent,

As a new resident of St Pete Beach (since April '09) I'm naturally interested in the city's legal battles and the underlying development issues.

As someone who's been involved in the process for some time, could you take a moment to answer a few questions that will help me better understand the city's position?

I can give you my personal opinions but I encourage you to read the entire City Comprehensive Plan to get your own feel for what is a VERY complicated issue. You can find our City's Comprehensive Plan on our City website at: <http://bit.ly/ik5Qic> Please note it takes a while to d/l since it is 202 pages long and entails over 3.6 Mbytes of data. I also want to point out that I have been on the Commission since April of 2009 (about when you became a resident here) which is about a decade after the activity to try to revise our Comprehensive Plan began; from a 20th Century Plan to one that will work for the betterment of the City in the 21st Century. Overdramatic? Perhaps, but it does seem to have been a long time doesn't it.

I started out trying to write very simple answers but as I reexamined my thoughts I found that your questions demand a serious bit of cognitive analysis; hence the delay in my answers and the resultant 4,300 words.

What's stopping any of the hotels from investing as much as they desire into their properties within the current land use ordinance?

Nothing but feasible economics, in my mind. Redevelopment of commercial enterprises is a financial equation. In a very simplified sense, to create a redeveloped viable business capital costs and operational expenses must be covered by the income generated by the future operation. If you own 10 acres and you want to put \$100,000 into it you will want to make sure that the resultant operational income will pay the redevelopment investment, taxes and insurance, and infrastructure fees on those 10 acres and its newly renovated building, along with all other fixed costs ongoing expenses, lost income during redevelopment and pay back the \$100k that you took out of your pocket (lost opportunity costs) or your loan (plus the cost of that money). The ongoing operational income on your new investment must also result in a profit.

I suspect that if you redevelop so as to only have 10 hotel rooms on 10 acres you will not be able to pay your taxes, insurance, and any financing you obtained to redevelop, let alone make a profit. How many units do you need? 10, 25, 50, 100, 250, 500? What is your buildable footprint? Are you on the Gulf? Setbacks, CCL location, shadowing? Don't forget parking, green space, beach access, and as the city points out in our mission statement; human scale. As an example, perhaps because of all the non-buildable requirements you can only build 20 units per floor. If you need 200 units you may need to build 10 stories tall to create an economically feasible redevelopment project. The only place that could be done is west of Gulf Blvd. along 0.9 miles (nine-tenths) in the large resort district, on the west side of the street.

Why is a change in height and density necessary?

To encourage redevelopment in specific commercial areas so as to allow our residential areas to remain residential and our commercial areas to focus on our local businesses and to help them to regain their competitive strength vis-à-vis other beach communities. There was not an overall increase in the possible population of the city but there was a shifting of allowable density to encourage smaller building in some areas and more ambitious building in others. Density shifts are a key land planning

tool. Density designation is the tool used to keep single family residential just as it is, to concentrate small apartments in certain areas, to keep boutique resorts in certain areas and to constrain large resorts to appropriate limited areas.

I am unclear if you are asking about height and density in the large resort district and or the other 95% of the City. Our Comp Plan needs to be a coordinated plan for the WHOLE city and to look at one small part of it is illogical. Part of the concept of a Plan is to allow for controlled growth and to steer the city towards what the resident's desire.

Way back in the dawn of the 21st century, people in our city urged the Commission to create an overall plan for our city to guide its future development.

The area designated as the Large Resort District is a .9 mile strip (nine-tenths of a mile) of land located on the west side of Gulf Boulevard north of the County Park and south of 64th Avenue containing approximately 65.16 acres which is approximately 5% of the total land area of the City. This is the area in which a redeveloped hotel could redevelop with structures of 12 stories of 146 feet. There are only, I think, nine eligible properties in the area. Could more properties be assembled to become eligible? A few, I think, but they would still need to be in that 5% area, south of 64th Ave. and north of the County Park, on the west side of Gulf Blvd.

When I think the situation over in my mind I deduce that to cover the fixed and variable costs, reinvested capital payback, and make a profit, an operator needs a certain income over time. A few factors to be considered on the income side of the equation are: number of units to rent, seasonality, ancillary uses (restaurant, bar, room service, etc.), room size, target customer audience (luxury, economy, etc.), conference facilities (scale, amenities, etc.).

Height we just talked about. It is an effect of income generation to support the capital and ongoing redevelopment costs. Density? Where? In the overall city; no increase. Regarding the 11 character zones. Which one are you asking about? Some lost density. Some gained. Since the idea was to prevent the spread of resorts into residential areas the large resort areas are encouraged to concentrate in their 9 tenths of a miles by having access to higher density. In November of 2003 the State and County determined that the way the City measured beach density was wrong. The City was using a formula that allowed properties to count the land west of the state's Coastal Construction Control Line (CCCL) along the beach to be counted toward allowable density. With less land being able to be counted some properties lost as much as 60% of their allowable units. This discovery greatly restricted resorts from redeveloping under the 1998 comp plan. Some of these properties would only be able to rebuild to 40% of their current density. They lost the ability (with the old height and density limitation) to rebuild even what they had. Changing height and density restrictions in certain areas is an attempt to make it possible for hotels to redevelop and compete in today's market and to increase their value to our City's business populace and tax base.

Just to put things into perspective, your property is almost 10,000 square feet and appears to have a 3,587 sq. ft. house on it. If you were impacted in roughly the same manner as were some of the hotel properties by the State and County changing your buildable lot-to-structure ratio and you wanted to rebuild you could only build about 1,470 sq. ft. If you went up to two stories then you might get back to around 2,940 and if you wanted the same floor area you currently have you would need to go up again to three stories. See the connection of height and density?

Why would a resident want to see more traffic on Gulf Blvd or the Corey Causeway?

To answer your simple question; I don't think anyone wants to see more traffic on Gulf Blvd; unless, of course, there are offsetting benefits. Like what? In this case I believe that endeavoring to eliminate vacant buildings and empty lots, to increase commercial property values (and therefore tax revenues), generate a rebirth of the St Pete Beach vitality, allow economically strong hotels, shops, and restaurants, and a rejuvenation of infrastructure, provision of additional beach access, and initiation of better transportation planning and execution. With our current traffic, and especially with any increase, I'd like to see Gulf Blvd. actually designed, not haphazardly grown, with fewer curb cuts, realistic space for bike lanes, coordinated signals to smooth flow, better pedestrian protection. Infrastructure improvements must be part of large-scale redevelopment. If we continue to piece-meal renovation we will continue to chop up traffic and add to the chaos. In my engineering mind, a revised comp plan is an opportunity to actually design our traffic structure (and our entire infrastructure). We focus large resorts in only 5% of our City's area and we focus any increase in traffic in that area and IF we then provide opportunities for pedestrian use, bicycles, and public and private boutique transportation modes we make things better.

Traffic is a result of activity. If we want less traffic we need to discourage tourists and provide fewer restaurants and shops for our residents to drive to. I do not believe that is what the majority of residents want. If we want to refill our empty lots and vacant buildings and encourage redevelopment to restore our economic vitality we need to accept the fact that more people will be moving about and we need to design for, and manage, that traffic, protect pedestrians, and encourage alternate forms of transportation.

Why would a homeowner want to appease those seeking more hotel rooms? Where's the benefit for any resident who doesn't own a hotel or business or isn't a realtor?

I am sure some homeowners may not. Some homeowners may desire a place with minimal commercial enterprises. Minimal restaurants, minimal bars, minimal shops. This place has a long and rich history of being a tourist area. In my mind the 1998 Comp plan encouraged the construction of condominiums as opposed to tourist lodging. So what? In my mind condos tend to result in fewer restaurants, bars, shops, etc. Drive up Gulf Blvd. and see for yourself the difference between us, Treasure Island, Madeira, Redington, North Redington, Redington Shores, Indian Shores, Indian Rocks, Bellair Shore, Bellair Beach, and on up through Sank Key to Clearwater Beach. My wife and I moved here because this little city has a great mix of residents surrounding a vivacious tourist area. I'd be surprised if anyone was surprised that St Pete Beach is a tourist destination. Part of the City Vision Statement that was devised by a previous City Commission states: "The City of St. Pete Beach will be a community of citizens, entrepreneurs and guests that embraces both progress and tradition equally and that seeks to fairly and rationally balance the needs of all community members; it will be a place where ideals and principles are valued, where accomplishment and talent are prized and where diversity is respected. St. Pete Beach will be a home to families and other residents who enjoy safe, healthy and attractive neighborhoods; it will be a place of business where investments are profitable and hard work is rewarded; it will be a pleasantly memorable destination where guests can relax and enjoy the natural and manmade environments. St. Pete Beach will be a well-planned and properly maintained City that is built on a human scale with respect for the community's visual context and the natural beauty of the island."

But wait, there is more; when it was put to a vote, the voters (a subset of residents who are a subset of homeowners) voted that they did want our current Comprehensive Plan designed to accommodate commercial redevelopment in specific ways in specific areas to rebuild our local tourist facilities and to

help preserve our restaurants, bars, and shops. And, they voted on a plan that evolved with years of public meetings, professional guidance, legal challenges, and arguments.

One gripe, not often fully understood, but often brought up, is the fact that residential properties (taken altogether) pay 4 to 5 times more property taxes than do the commercial properties (again, added altogether). Property taxes are a direct function of property value. That means that the aggregate of our residential properties are valued at 4 to 5 times the aggregate of our commercial properties. There are two ways to increase the proportion of taxes that our commercial properties pay. First, increase the number of commercial properties relative to residential properties; Second, keep the number of properties as is but induce the commercial properties to increase their value through redevelopment. In my mind, residential property owners are currently more likely to refurbish, renovate and redevelop their properties due to the personal “drivers” related to taking care of your nest. Commercial owners are in business to make money on their investments. Our City Vision statement (crafted by the commission before me) states in part: “it will be a place of business where investments are profitable and hard work is rewarded”. If a reinvestment in redevelopment is not going to profit our businesses they have less incentive to redevelop. If one group of owners (residential) improves their property and one (commercial) is less likely to do so, the total valuation, over time, of residential property will climb relative to commercial property. IF you want commercial property owners to pay a higher percentage of our overall taxes then they need to be encouraged (not discouraged) to redevelop and make their property worth more. I believe this is a very simple concept. If our businesses continue to close up, more and more of the tax burden will shift to the residents.

[Why would we want more people using the beaches than we already have? And why would a resident want more public beach access?](#)

People come to our resorts to relax at one of the best beaches in the world (my opinion). Given that we want that to continue we want to improve our beach accesses. Our residents deserve access to one of the reasons that many of them live here; our beaches. We have, in my opinion, decent but not great public beach access. Pass-a-Grille has very good access; the Large Resort Character District, not so much. I believe that adding to our resident’s ease of use of our beaches is a good thing to do. Preservation of, and adding to, beach access is among the top ten concerns residents express to me. To quote one of the City’s core values: “The Sanctity, Preservation, and Protection of the Beach, and Access to the Beach for All”.

[Why does promoting development, as the city's management seems to want, the only thing that matters?](#)

It is not in my mind. The Comp Plan that was voted on in June of 2008 was created by petitions of a citizen group. The City (I don’t understand who you think “management” is) originally refused to put the issues on the ballot, was taken to court, lost and as part of a settlement agreement did finally put the ordinances on the ballot where all four received the majority of the elector’s votes. Preservation of our tax base (assuming we want to remain a city) and quality of life for our residents and visitors is a prime Mission concept.

[Why would we want to allow any hotel to be taller than the Don Cesar \(138'\), the first hotel on the island? Since the Don is effectively precluded from raising it's\[sic\] height, why should newer hotels be given an advantage \(up to 146'\)?](#)

I am not sure where to begin. The Don is not the “first hotel on the island”, not even close. Long key is arguably the one of the earliest specific tourist destination islands in the area if not the Gulf Coast. Just as arguably, the Bonhomie was the first hotel in what is now St Pete Beach, followed by the Lizotte,

Mason, La Plaza or Pass-a-Grille Hotel. The Don opened in 1927 I think, was bought by the Federal Government during WWII, vacated for razing in 1969, bought, renovated and reopened in 1973. The Mediterranean and Moorish styled building is a LANDMARK but not a BENCHMARK; certainly a jewel for our city. It is a very nice hotel. It reminds me of the D'Angleterre in Denmark, Culloden House in Scotland, or Hotel Principe di Savoia in Italy. While a wonderful, traditional historic structure there is no justification as establishing it as an example of modern construction. Discounting its location in what is largely a residential/low-rise area, it is non-conforming in almost every way except for land use. It is precluded from raising its height. It has about 270 rooms. On the west side of Gulf Blvd. they are allowed 112 units based on acreage and density. They are way over the limit. If we let them count the parking lot area across the street they could go as high as 187 units. They are way over that limit. With a density limit of 30 units per acre, the Land Development Code would require 1,452 square feet of land area per unit so 272 units (x 1452 square feet = 394,944 square feet) would need about 9 acres.

If we would allow them to redevelop across the street in the residential area where their parking lot is they still only have 6.2 acres (subtracting out, of course, their area seaward of the CCCL, where they cannot build).

The height limit in the Don area is limited to 50 feet. The front yard setback is 50'. Required side yards are 10% of lot width. I don't see holding that property up as THE BENCHMARK.

Based on the judge's clear ruling, it appears the city has spent a great deal of taxpayer money following a misguided plan of action and dubious legal advice. How is a newcomer to see this as anything other than poor management of the city's financial resources?

Opinions differ as to how "clear" the ruling is and how well founded in law it is. Note that we are not yet appealing the decision but rather asking for clarification and the opportunity to explain the community's position in a different way that the Judge might understand. Defending the residents vote is not bad management. If the City does not defend the vote then voting becomes a waste. I believe the intention of the comp plan was fundamentally good. I believe that organizing our city and proactively designing its redevelopment is a good thing. I believe representative government is a good thing.

I will also add that the City is defending the vote over a comprehensive plan amendment that was submitted through the citizen initiative process and subsequently approved by 58% of the voters. Not misguided but rather driven by and heavily approved by the City's citizens. The only challenges that have succeeded to date (9 Dec) are procedural, that is they challenge the referendum process and not the content of the actual comprehensive plan amendment.

It is apparent to me that voting on complex plan amendments with hundreds of pages creates a myriad of challenges when trying to comply with the state law that limits ballot language to 75 words. I feel that the voters fully understood what they were voting on in the 2008 comprehensive plan amendment ballot.

I have read newspapers that report self-serving, unreasonable comments like these:
"we, the city, and the residents, lost"

Did I miss something or are Dr. Pyle and others who voted against the plan, not residents also?

Of course they are, I am surprised you find it necessary to ask. You missed nothing with the possible exception that, as I am sure you know, there were four ballot items and that there was 3,390 votes cast on the issue with the fewest votes. In total there were 13,568 votes cast. In America, when people

vote, they expect (at least in my opinion) their vote to be heard. It does not seem appropriate that one lone person, who lawyer opines that "everyone else" did not understand what they were voting on, can negate, discard, trash, obviate, 13,568 votes. I'll also add that statement is false. I have spoken to many people who did understand what they were voting on. I have not had anyone come to me and say: "I had no clue what the heck I was doing but I just went ahead and guessed." I also have much more faith in our voting residents to take the time and have the intelligence to know what they were voting on. The United States has a tradition of political disagreement. I don't know if you support our current President or Governor or how you voted on our recent State Amendments but I do know our democratic republic is based on majorities and minorities and I suspect that your expectation is that your vote would not be discarded several years after the election. Regardless of whether you voted for or against the 2008 Comprehensive Plan your vote is being attacked by one person who doesn't like what the majority of residents wanted.

All four of the ballot issues establishing our Comp Plan were clearly approved by a majority of our voters. I believe that people read the vast majority of materials available to inform them of the issues and understood what they were voting on. People are smart. As an informed voter, I am sure you educated yourself on the issues you vote on. I know that I do. I believe that the city has a duty to the majority of residents who did vote in favor of the issues to defend their vote against a single person's dislike of the outcome.

"How is our city going to compete and bring tourists here?"

I see parking lots full at restaurants and hotels. So where's the inherent, unquestionable need for more development, more density, more tourists?

I believe you might want to speak with restaurant and hotel owners about your perception of the business they are doing. I do so continually. There has not been a redeveloped major hotel here for decades. When visitors do choose to spend their hard earned money in this tough economy they may think twice before coming to 25 year old resorts with yet another coat of paint. Again, we are looking at redevelopment, not development. It is not about the possibility of MORE density in our City. It is about designing where that density goes. Corey Circle did once have active commercial interests located on the water. There have been operating businesses at the corner of Gulf and 75th. The Coral Reef was once a brand new facility. Redevelopment. The Comp Plan does not add to the overall density in the City. It redistributes it to encourage controlled planned redevelopment in areas that citizen attended visioning session and planning consultants think made sense. More tourists? To prevent more businesses from shutting down; The Reef, Bennis, The ABC Liquor store, Leverocks, The Coral Reef, The Cockney Rebel,..... More tourists? To make our hotels, shops, restaurants and bars stronger businesses that can reinvest in their properties, increase the value of those properties, pay more real estate taxes on those increased values and drive infrastructure improvements in our City.

"without the hotel community we can't survive"

Excuse me, but it appears the city is surviving and would survive even if there weren't any hotels. It's a beautiful place to live -- that's why we moved here. And the hotels seem to be surviving just fine; I don't see any for-sale signs. I am not sure what you mean by survival. If you mean empty buildings, decreased tax base, reduced services, empty lots (next to the 7-11 on Corey, the Coral Reef, Corey Circle, Gulf Blvd along the Intercoastal, the old ABC liquor site, two quadrants of Cory and 72nd, etc.) you may be right. I don't know what to tell you about you not seeing any For Sale signs; perhaps you should count the For Rent signs too. Both mean: empty.

It IS a beautiful place to live. That is why we moved here too. We spent several months spread out over several years searching from Venice to Hudson before we specifically picked St Pete Beach. We also expected the vitality that comes with a residential community surrounding a tourist resort area. It depends on if you want SPB to be like Sand Key, or Bellair Beach, or.....St Pete Beach.

I suggest you do what I have done; get out and speak to business owners and ask how business is going and what they think of our muddled Comp Plan situation.

[I just don't get it.](#) I can only give you my opinion. Investigate for yourself. Please do not take my word for anything without doing your own investigation. I appreciate that you asked me to answer a few questions but I am just one person trying to represent what I understand to be the best interests of our residents. The objective is to provide what the St Pete Beach Community wants. Will everyone be happy with that, regardless of what "that" is? Of course not. Each of us can only strive to do what we think is best. I think allowing and planning redevelopment to allow our tourist businesses to be competitive is a good thing.

[Thanks for inviting comments and for any insight you can provide.](#)

Thanks for providing me with the impetus to revisit my opinions. The major things I learned have been the specific vote percentages that approved the four current Comp Plan Ordinances, the specific vote percentages that our voters originally passed our local Hometown, vote-on-everything charter amendments, the subsequent specific percentages by which our voters revoked most of those vote-on-everything amendments, the local precinct percentages by which our voters disliked and voted against the Statewide Hometown Democracy Vote-on-everything Amendment 4 and the timeline that lead up to the current situation and the multitude of public input meetings held on Comprehensive Planning for St Pete Beach residents. I had read through this information as part of my initial research into originally becoming a commission candidate but it is interesting to review it with almost 2 years of more direct involvement as a City Commissioner.