

# *Introduction*

**CLEARWATER** | 20  
A bright and beautiful future. 45

## INTRODUCTION

### What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a policy document designed to guide decisions on the city's future growth and development for the next 20 years. The comprehensive plan offers a vision of what the city aspires to be in the future, a roadmap to guide decisions to achieve the vision, and a measuring stick to evaluate progress. As a statement of municipal policy, a comprehensive plan is adopted by ordinance of the City Council and implemented through the city's land development regulations, various public programs and initiatives, and local and regional capital improvement projects. A comprehensive plan gives voice to a community's aspirations for the future. It provides a clear, concise vision and goals that are memorable, easy to understand, and that reflect a broad base of community input.

A comprehensive plan is distinct in that it confronts the city's important issues in a high-level, big-picture way. While other adopted plans deal with specialized topics such as parks, transportation, natural resources, or specific neighborhoods or areas, only a comprehensive plan lays out a 20-year vision for the community as a whole and truly acknowledges how Clearwater's people, places, values, and aspirations are interconnected and interdependent. A comprehensive plan steps away from fine-grained details and overly specific issues and serves as a guiding document for city leaders and residents.

Additionally, it should be recognized that the city is not the only agent influencing change within the community and region; its efforts and powers alone are not sufficient to achieve a comprehensive plan's vision. A collaborative effort will be required between the city, its neighboring and overlapping jurisdictions, community partners, and its residents to advance a comprehensive plan's goals.

*Clearwater 2045* is the city's new *Comprehensive Plan (Plan)*. This *Plan* will aid City Council in their decision making and support city staff in their efforts to development projects, programs, and code amendments to guide the city through the next 20 years.

### Legislative Requirements for Comprehensive Plans

Florida law requires all local governments to prepare, adopt, and enforce long-range comprehensive plans through the "Local Government Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulation Act". Chapter 163, Florida Statutes (F.S.), is part of the state's growth management laws that govern comprehensive plans, requiring jurisdictions to include elements on future land use; housing; transportation; recreation and open space; conservation; coastal management; general sanitary sewer, solid waste, drainage, potable water, and natural groundwater; intergovernmental coordination; private property rights; and capital improvements. Although *Clearwater 2045* is organized into individual chapters, elements are identified within each chapter and are interrelated and consistent with the requirements of Chapter 163, F.S.

An important part of this *Plan* rewrite involved an overhaul of its organizational structure to provide a user-friendly format and better highlight the relationships between chapters. The reorganization consolidates the required elements into chapters organized around major themes.

## Organization and Use of Clearwater 2045

*Clearwater 2045* is broken down into six chapters: Quality Places; Mobility; Parks & Public Places; Conservation & Coastal Management; Support Services; and Plan Implementation. The requirements found within Chapter 163, F.S. are included in these chapters as shown in the table below.

Chapter	Required Elements
Quality Places	Future Land Use, Housing
Mobility	Transportation
Parks & Public Places	Recreation and Open Space
Conservation & Coastal Management	Conservation, Coastal Management
Support Services	Public Utilities
Plan Implementation	Intergovernmental Coordination, Capital Improvements, and Property Rights

The *Plan* describes actions that will be taken by the city to guide the built environment. These actions and strategies are defined and organized into goals, objectives, and policies within each chapter and are defined in the graphic on the following page. Goals are aspirational statements about a desired future outcome that provide long-term vision and serve as the *Plan's* foundation. Objectives are more specific statements that provide direction the achieve a given goal. Policies are the specific courses of action used to achieve the given goal and objective. Policies are intended to be used regularly to guide the day-to-day decision-making and direct actions to be taken by City Council to implement the *Plan*.

## Planning Themes

Sustainability, resiliency, equity, and collaborative planning are cross-cutting principles that appear in each of the *Plan's* six chapters. These principles as well as a shared vision were developed through feedback received during community engagement. Building on these principles, overarching planning themes were created that guided the development of the goals, objectives, and policies presented in the *Plan*. There are many topics that will fall into more than one chapter thereby creating overlap between the chapters that tie them together. The chapter design is meant to make the *Plan* easier to use and find information.

## Use of the Plan

*Clearwater 2045* is a policy document used by elected officials, city staff, other jurisdictions and agencies, developers, and residents to inform and guide land use and policy decisions.

- Elected officials adopt the *Plan*, ensure consistency in applying the *Plan* to land use decisions, and utilize the *Plan* to guide decisions regarding development and redevelopment.
- City staff use this *Plan* to build upon existing plans and community partnerships. Staff will consult it when reviewing changes to the *Community Development Code (CDC)*, applications for Future Land Use or Zoning Atlas Amendments, and applications for projects or development and making recommendations for facilities, services, programs, and capital improvements. Department heads will use the *Plan* to inform the preparation of work plans, budgets, and the CIP.
- Other jurisdictions, agencies, and partners can use the *Plan* to identify and implement mutually supportive goals, objectives, or policies.
- Developers use the *Plan* to guide their choices related to the land use, density or intensity, and character of development proposed in the city. The *Plan* creates a starting point for conversation about important issues and questions that will be considered when making land use decisions.

# INTRODUCTION

## Community Engagement

Engagement activities, including listening sessions, youth workshops, in-person and virtual community conversations, served as a foundation for the plan update.

## A Shared Vision

From the beach to the bay, Clearwater is a city of diverse, unique and special places; livable neighborhoods; economic resiliency; friendly people; and amazing opportunities.

## Planning Themes

Overarching themes guided the development of plan goals, objectives, and polices.



A City of Opportunity



Livable & Attractive Places



A Sustainable & Resilient Environment



Connected & Accessible Destinations



Diverse & Inclusive Communities



Cooperative & Responsive Governance

## Six Core Chapters with Goals, Objectives, Policies

Goals are high level statements of what we want to achieve, objectives set the specific direction towards accomplishing the goal, and the policies are the steps taken to achieve the objective.



Quality Places



Mobility



Parks & Recreation



Conversation & Coastal Management



Support Services



Plan Implementation

- Residents of Clearwater are the experts in their neighborhoods and shape implementation of the *Plan* through advocacy, action, and partnership with the city. The *Plan* can be used to foster better discussion of the positive aspects of growth and development as well as concerns about changes to Clearwater.

## Plan Updates

A comprehensive plan serves as a foundational tool that guides the community toward its desired outcomes and is meant to be a “living document” that should be revisited and updated over time to meet the changing conditions and evolving needs of the community.

The Florida Department of Commerce (DOC) requires comprehensive plans to be reviewed every seven years through a formal process to determine whether plan amendments are required to address changes in state requirements. The city completed its Evaluation and Appraisal Review in late 2022 and determined that as of that time no amendments were needed to reflect changes in state requirements. *Clearwater 2045* does address changes that were effective in 2023 as well as changes in local conditions.

## History of Clearwater

A tourism hotspot located on the Gulf Coast of Florida just to the west of Tampa and St. Petersburg, Clearwater is home to one of the country’s best beaches. With a permanent population of over 117,000 and a land area of over 25 square miles, Clearwater is also the county seat for Pinellas County.

### Early Clearwater

The City of Clearwater was originally incorporated in 1891 as part of Hillsborough County and was known as “Clear Water Harbor” until the name was shortened to Clearwater in 1906. In 1912, the Pinellas Peninsula was separated from Hillsborough County to form Pinellas County and shortly thereafter the City of Clearwater was reincorporated on May 27, 1915, as part of Pinellas County.

Clearwater’s population and popularity as tourist destination grew leading the city to build the first wooden bridge connecting the city to Clearwater Beach in 1916, opening the beach for development and increased tourism. Access to Clearwater Beach has evolved over the years, resulting in the causeway that provides access today. From the first iteration of the causeway, it included iconic landscaping that continues to shape the character of this important gateway.



Postcard of the Memorial Causeway. Photo credit: Clearwater Historical Society

# INTRODUCTION

## First Comprehensive Plan

As a result of the Florida land boom in the 1920s, the city recognized the need for a city plan and in 1925 hired John Nolen, a nationally known planner, to prepare a plan for the city. Nolen's 1926 plan was a *Comprehensive City Plan* that included a street thoroughfare system, locations of schools, playgrounds and parks, a civic center and Downtown business district as well as industrial areas north and south of Downtown. Many of Nolen's concepts remain valid today, most importantly, the recognition of the waterfront as the city's premier natural asset, the significance of Downtown as the center of the city, and a multi-faceted park system to serve all citizens.

## Early Economy

The land boom quickly halted in 1926, followed by the stock market crash of 1929, and the onset of the Great Depression. During World War II, Clearwater became a major training base for US troops destined for Europe and the Pacific. After the war, many of the soldiers who had trained here returned to live creating a built-in audience for professional baseball. The Philadelphia Phillies began holding spring training camp in Clearwater in the 1940s developing an important economic and cultural relationship. Downtown remained a center for business, shopping, and celebrations such as the annual Fun 'n' Sun Parade organized by the Chamber of Commerce.

## Growth & Development

The city's growth and development patterns over its first century are typical to those in many cities. Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods typically have mixtures of uses, smaller lots, and a connected street grid. Homes in these areas, as well as portions of Clearwater Beach, were primarily built before the early 1960s and are typically smaller, slab on grade construction, and may need investment to incorporate modern building techniques to expand lifespans.

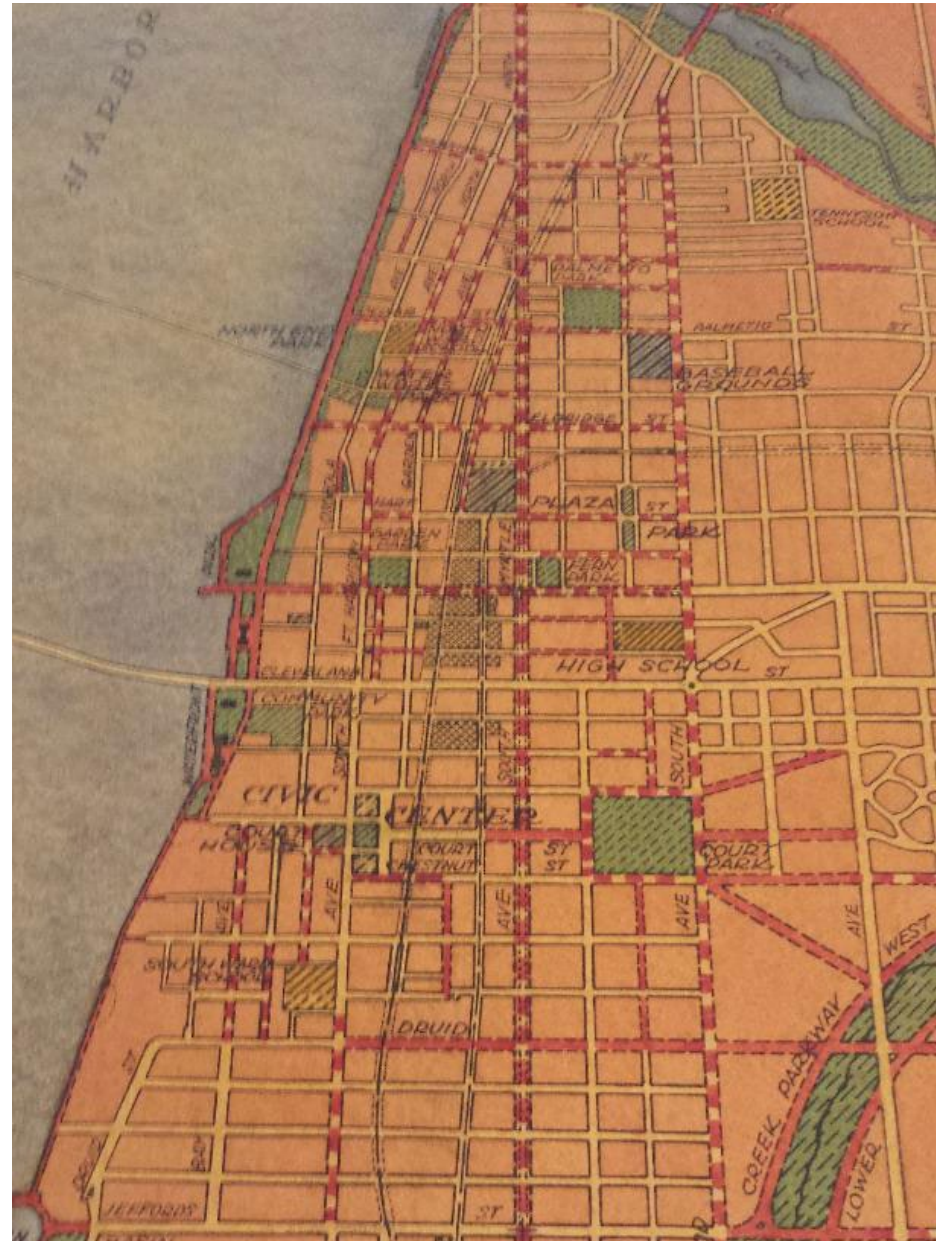


Photo of the original Nolen Comprehensive Plan

The city continued to expand eastward and saw sizable growth in the northeastern portion of the city, such as Countryside. Commercial and residential uses are separated, and automobile ownership is a necessity. Indoor shopping malls constructed outside of Downtown in the 1960s and 1970s provided retail opportunities for both residents in newer neighborhoods such as Countryside as well as a regional population north and south along US 19. However, as in many other cities in the country, it also contributed to a slow decline of Downtown as the city center.

From 1950 until today, the city's population grew from 15,000 to over 117,000 residents. Clearwater receives a boost in population in summer from families on vacation and in the winter from people looking to escape the cold. Tourism remains a driver in population and economic growth as well as development and redevelopment opportunities.

### **Moving Forward**

The city continues to be known for the high quality of public services, parks and recreational areas, cultural opportunities such as performing arts and long-standing annual musical festivals, and of course its beaches. As it moves forward, the city needs to evolve with the diversifying and growing population and consider where and how Clearwater can best progress: what places need thoughtful reinvestment, what places can best support growth, and what types of development are desired throughout the city.

The city embraces its past while looking forward to the endless opportunities to support the vision of a bright and beautiful city from bay to beach.

### **Development Patterns of Clearwater**

The time period in which development in a city occurs influences a multitude of factors, including typical size of parcels, street patterns, and prevalent uses. Clearwater Beach and Downtown Clearwater date back to the early-to-mid 20th century and have walkable conditions with gridded street patterns and mixed-use building types. A transformation in character development occurred as the city expanded

east during the mid-to-late 20th century. Here, automobile-centric patterns with curvilinear streets, larger lot and block sizes, and single use building forms prevail.

### **Clearwater Beach**

Clearwater Beach has seen substantial growth over the years with predominantly residential uses found in the northern portion and high intensity resort and tourist-oriented uses found along the main public beach area.

### **Downtown Clearwater**

Recognizing the untapped potential of the city's iconic bluff, the city prepared a master revitalization plan for Downtown Clearwater's waterfront area. Coachman Park reopened in June of 2023 with an expanded and improved waterfront park that includes a 4,000-seat covered amphitheater, playground, splash pad, garden, and gateway plaza that will act as a catalyst to activate Downtown Clearwater.

### **Neighborhoods**

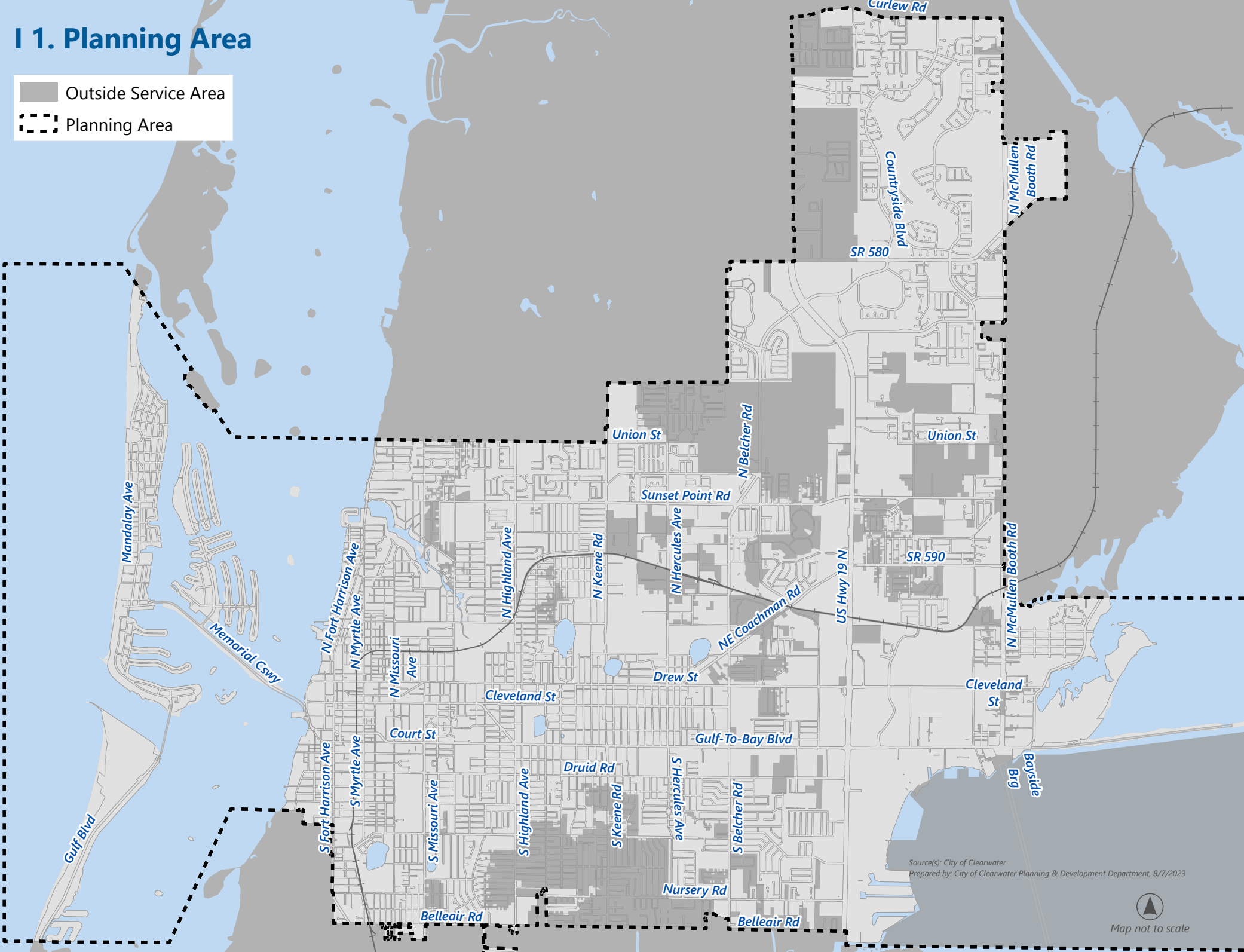
Neighborhoods adjacent to Downtown Clearwater are generally the oldest communities in the city. These neighborhoods contain a variety of housing types including small homes on small lots that were mostly built prior to 1964 and two-family and multifamily residential farther to the north.

Newer communities straddle US 19 with McMullen Booth Road and Old Tampa Bay serving as the eastern boundaries. These areas, primarily built after 1960, represent typical mid-to-late 20th century development forms including curvilinear street patterns, single-use low-rise buildings on large lots, and spacious single-family housing and lot sizes in subdivided communities. Multifamily projects, mobile home parks, and office uses are focused near arterial corridors and activity centers along US 19. Although these uses are in close proximity to retail and restaurants, deep building setbacks, the lack of a local street grid, and limited streetscape and pedestrian amenities make walking from place to place an impractical alternative to driving.



# I 1. Planning Area

■ Outside Service Area  
⋯ Planning Area



Source(s): City of Clearwater  
Prepared by: City of Clearwater Planning & Development Department, 8/7/2023



## Clearwater 2045 Data

This *Plan* covers the Clearwater Planning Area, which includes the incorporated city limits and unincorporated areas located along the city’s boundaries. The 17,497-acre area shown on **Map I 1. Planning Area** includes 14,183 acres of the City of Clearwater and 3,314 acres of unincorporated Pinellas County. These areas include the landmass of the city excluding major waterbodies and road rights-of-way.

### Population

According to the 2020 census, the City of Clearwater has a population of 117,292 and is the third largest city in the Tampa Bay Metropolitan area. Over the past 20 years, the city has experienced a population growth of 7.8% from 108,787 in 2000.

When looking at projections from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), which uses models created by the University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR), the population is expected to grow within incorporated Clearwater by nearly 5,000 residents to 122,713 over the next 20 years. When accounting for the areas of unincorporated Pinellas County that reside within the city’s planning area, those 20-year projections total just over 148,000 residents.

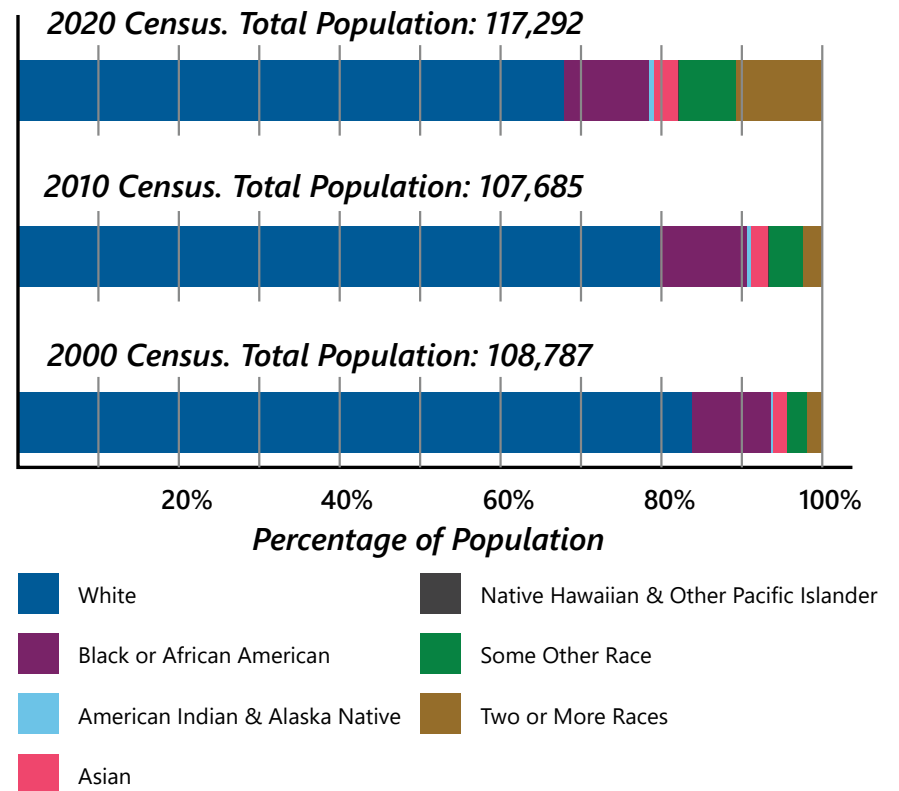
### Race & Ethnicity

Over the past 20 years, the percentage of the city’s population identifying as white has decreased from 83.9% in 2000 to only 68.0% in 2020 as shown in **Figure 1. City of Clearwater Total Population Comparison**. The Black/African American population has remained relatively stable as a percentage of the overall city population. Population groups seeing increases are Asian, from 1.6% in 2000 to 2.9% in 2020, some other race, from 2.5% in 2000 to 7.1% in 2020, and two or more races, from 1.8% in 2000 to 10.7% in 2020.

While not shown in Figure 1, ethnicity percentages have followed similar trends from the 2000 census to the 2020 census. In 2000, only 9.0% of the population reported having a Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, whereas in 2010 that percentage increased to 14.2% and again increased to 17.4% in 2020.

With the continued increase in population in a predominantly built-out city, creative ways to address housing needs will be a priority. Additionally, the population is becoming more diverse in race and ethnicity making the overarching theme of equity an important addition to this *Plan*.

Figure 1. City of Clearwater Total Population Comparison



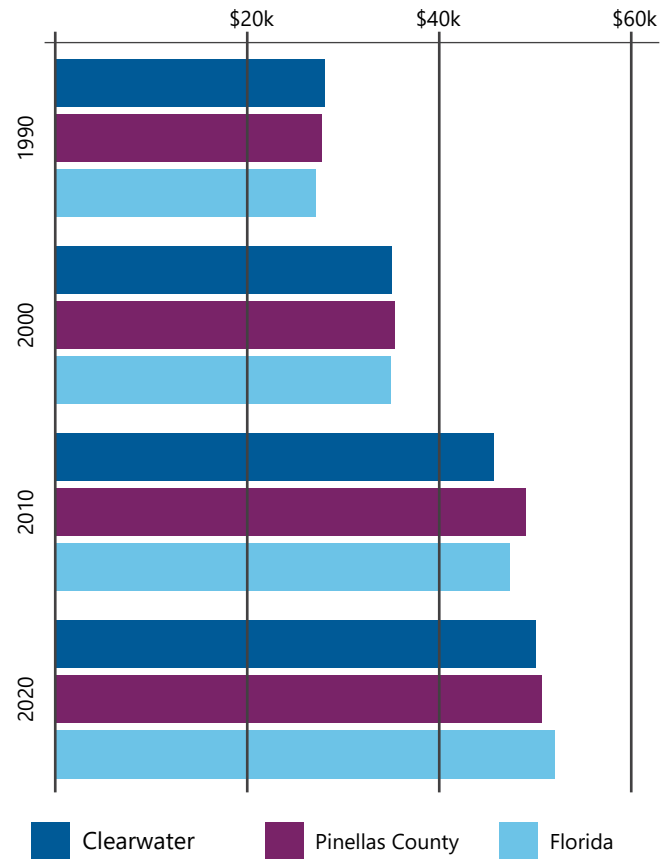
# INTRODUCTION

## Household Income

The 2020 census identified the median household income within the city as \$50,355, which is lower than both Pinellas County and the State of Florida as shown in **Figure 2. Median Household Incomes**. The median household income in the city increased by 34.4%, from \$29,029 to \$39,004 between 1990 and 2000 representing the largest decade of change since 1990. The smallest change since 1990 was an increase of 8.2% that came between 2010 and 2020. County and state median household incomes followed similar trends. Between 1990 and 2000, the median household income in Pinellas County increased by 39.46%, from \$28,280 to \$39,439, and increased by 41.2%, from \$27,483 to \$38,819, throughout the state. Likewise, the smallest rates of increase for both the county and state were between 2010 and 2020, with Pinellas County experiencing a 14% increase and the state experiencing an increase of 20.6%. Both of those increases were larger than the city's increase.

Related to its lower median income, Clearwater has a slightly higher percent of households that are cost burdened (47%) than the state (44%). A household is considered cost burdened if more than 30% of the household's income goes towards housing costs (rent/mortgage, utilities, taxes, etc.). However, the city has a lower percentage of persons who live below the poverty level (14.1%) compared to the state (16.1%). It is important to note that because of their fixed incomes, retired populations often fall into this category not traditionally considered to be living in poverty.

Figure 2. Median Household Incomes

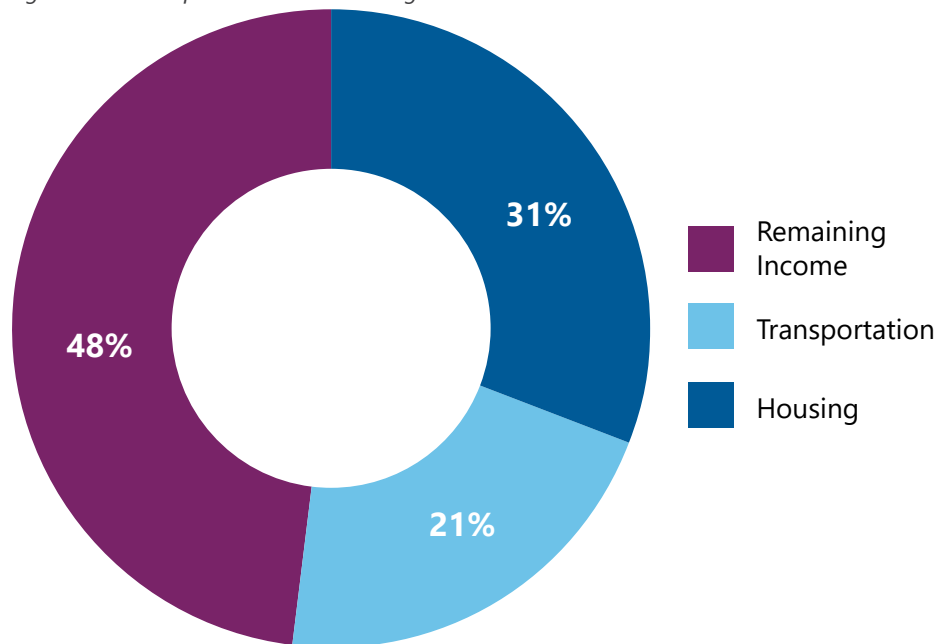


## Transportation

Transportation costs are typically a household's second-largest expense, and the city's pattern of development contributes to residents' increased dependence on vehicle ownership (1.55 vehicles per household) and traveling more miles annually (14,259 average household vehicle miles traveled) which ultimately results in higher household costs. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, Clearwater residents spend on average 52% of income on housing and transportation combined as shown in **Figure 3**.

**Transportation and Housing Costs.** Many *Plan* policies address factors that, when implemented, should help reduce these expenses, including providing more mobility options, making transportation safer overall, and economic development policies to bring greater employment opportunities to the city.

Figure 3. Transportation and Housing Costs



## Clearwater 2045 Development

The last extensive rewrite of the city's *Comprehensive Plan* occurred in 2008, followed by several small technical updates with the latest being adopted in July 2023. Although the city's Evaluation and Appraisal Review completed in 2022 did not identify any required amendments, the city initiated a major rewrite of the *Comprehensive Plan* with the intent of addressing the emerging trends and key issues that are most relevant to the community with a particular focus on engaging a broader cross-section of the community.

This process of rewriting the *Plan* included significant analysis, outreach, education, and coordination across departments and organizations. It has been guided by the citizens of Clearwater coming together to discuss what is most important. As a community-driven plan, it seeks to address inequities and unite the community behind a shared set of goals for the city's future. The goals, objectives, and policies in this *Plan* aim to help shape the future of the places we live, work, shop, and play by preserving what's important to the community and guiding investments that help Clearwater remain a vibrant and unique city. The *Plan* will help ensure a high quality of life for residents and an attractive city for employers, employees, and visitors.

## Community Engagement

To ensure that the final *Plan* represents an equitable future for all Clearwater residents, the public engagement process was robust, innovative, and inclusive. The planning team engaged many perspectives through a variety of tools so that all residents could be included at the table.

Between April and July 2021, city staff conducted a series of outreach and community engagement activities. These activities included three types of Community Conversations (In-Person, Youth and Zoom), as well as listening sessions.

A project website, [clearwater2045.com](http://clearwater2045.com), was created to allow residents to monitor the *Plan's* progress, stay informed of upcoming meetings, review preliminary plans and reports, and provide feedback. During the community engagement process polls, questionnaires, and surveys

# INTRODUCTION

were used to gather additional input from community members including a “5 Key Questions” questionnaire and a photo contest for participants to submit photos of what makes Clearwater unique. Two of the photos from this contest are included in the *Plan*.

In addition, the city provided outreach to the Hispanic community by providing materials translated into Spanish as well as having Spanish translators available at meetings. City staff also made multiple presentations at the Hispanic Outreach Center.

In-person community engagement sessions were held at five recreation centers, the Main Library, and the Hispanic Outreach Center. While the discussions varied during each session, numerous concepts, issues, and ideas continually arose. These common themes include the following:

- Concerns about transportation issues, including safety, multimodal connections, congestion, public transportation, and bikeability and walkability.
- Interest in promoting cultural, social, and artistic vibrancy citywide including increasing the number of events (concerts, markets, etc.) and entertainment opportunities appealing to a diverse age range of the community.
- Bringing new life to Downtown with more local businesses and restaurants.
- Balancing the emphasis of city policy and programs between neighborhoods, Downtown, Clearwater Beach, and other corridors.
- Emphasizing sustainability in development and preservation of natural resources.

These common themes in addition to the visioning activity at the in-person sessions led to the creation of the updated vision statement for *Clearwater 2045*.

**“From the beach to the bay, Clearwater is a city of diverse, unique, and special places; livable neighborhoods’ economic resiliency friendly people; and amazing opportunities.”**

Finalization of the *Plan* was guided by an extensive public engagement process between April and June 2023. The process included distributing the draft chapters and full draft *Plan* on the project website and presentations during a series of public workshops held throughout the community in addition to presentations to the Community Development Board, Environmental Advisory Board, and City Council.

## Place-Based Framework

Typically, comprehensive plans are general in nature, providing a framework and policy context to make decisions relating to land use, public capital investments, and future development or redevelopment.

*Clearwater 2045* utilizes a place-based framework which organizes the city into five primary categories: Neighborhoods; Mixed-Use Centers, Corridors and Neighborhood Centers; Activity Centers, and Employment Districts. This defines the preferred character and quality of places across the city, and *Clearwater 2045* provides guidance regarding appropriate density, intensity, form, and character of development and redevelopment for each type of area.

A detailed overview and map of the framework categories is contained in the Quality Places Chapter.

## Other Plans

Other city plans and studies advance the vision of *Clearwater 2045* through more detailed goals and actions. These plans and studies are referenced throughout this *Plan* and in the goals, objectives, and policies. It is the intent of these references to reflect the most recently adopted or approved version of each plan or study.

