

City Council Proposed Strategic Initiatives

Sparkling Clearwater is a uniquely beautiful and vibrant community that is socially and economically diverse, that reinvests in itself and is a wonderful place to live, learn, work and play.

City of Clearwater Vision Statement

Modified, March 2005

Ranking of Strategic Initiatives

As part of the Council's visioning exercises earlier in 2005, thirteen priority initiatives were developed in support of the adopted vision statement. Each of these was carefully vetted and refined to best address the issues seen as critical to promoting the specific initiative.

The City Council recognized that the funds could never be found to enable them to pursue all thirteen initiatives. To help determine which initiatives were most reflective of the community's needs and concerns, attendees at the Community Visioning exercises were asked to review each of the listed initiatives and rank those five that they felt were the most important to the City's future.

The initiatives are listed here in order from the highest to the lowest priority, as determined by the respondents at the community workshops.

1 Safe, Clean, Green Environment - 157 (13.5%)

Clearwater is a safe place to live – it has low crime and people feel safe here. There is access to good emergency medical services, police and fire protection. It is a clean city – there is no litter in the streets, no graffiti on walls. Buildings and grounds are well maintained; streets are well lit; store windows are bright and attractive. It is a well landscaped city with many street trees, parks and nature preserves. It is also a “green” city that is environmentally friendly, with recycling programs and other efforts to reduce waste and enhance efficiency.

2 A Quality Beach Environment – 126 (10.8%)

Clearwater Beach is a special place within the City. A resource for all our residents, it is also one of the premier tourist destinations in Florida. Easily accessible by a variety of means, it is clean and safe, and includes a wide variety of activities oriented towards people of all ages and inclinations. It includes a balanced blend of full-time residents and short-term visitors, with a wide variety of restaurants, shops and other leisure time activities.



3 A Vibrant Downtown that's Mindful of its Heritage – 104 (8.9%)

Downtown Clearwater is the center of our City. It links current-day Clearwater to its historic heritage, and blends all types of uses and buildings into a cohesive and active district that includes offices, stores and shops, restaurants and bars, residents, civic places and other institutions. The key elements of downtown are its streets, which are active and vibrant pedestrian-friendly environments. New blends with old here, helping create a great place where people of all ages come to live, work, and play, or simply to hang out.

4 Variety of Cultural and Recreational Offerings – 95 (8.1%)

Clearwater offers a wide variety of leisure-time activities for its citizens. These include the numerous parks and active recreation facilities, as well as access to the many water bodies that help define the city's geography. For organized events, the City includes Ruth Eckerd Hall, with its national and international performances, the Francis Wilson Playhouse, and Coachman Park by the Bay.

5 High Quality Education – 90 (7.7%)

In Clearwater, each child can reach his or her full educational potential. The City has established partnerships with the County School Board, St. Petersburg College and local vocational schools to insure that there are opportunities for all citizens, young and old to learn and train themselves. Students, in turn, add to the energy of the City, particularly in enclaves such as the Downtown.

6 Economic Vitality and Reinvestment – 89 (7.6%)

Clearwater fosters an environment that is attractive to new businesses, and supports locally-owned enterprises. It is proactive in identifying areas of economic need and in providing the public investments that help drive private development in these areas. Clearwater recognizes that a vital community is only as healthy as its individual neighborhoods, and that targeted revitalization efforts help to maintain a healthy community.

7 Well-Maintained Infrastructure – 88 (7.5%)

The City of Clearwater functions efficiently, in part because of our infrastructure which is both effective and non-obtrusive. Streets work well for both pedestrians and cars. They are well lit and clean. Flooding is controlled, and both potable and reclaimed water are available throughout the City. Electronic infrastructure is increasingly found throughout the city as well; many enclaves, such as Downtown, have complete WiFi coverage, making the Internet accessible to anyone in these areas.

8 Diverse High-Paying Jobs – 81 (6.9%)

Clearwater looks to create and import wealth into the community. It will not be dependent on a single industry or a single company for its economic success. There will be opportunities for many different and diverse skills within the community, and for people with all different levels of experience within these skills. The city looks to create "clean" jobs that pay above-median salaries, particularly in fields that are part of the creative industries. There are opportunities for well-trained young people, including the "creative class," the "young and restless."

9 Safe, Comfortable, Walkable Neighborhoods – 80 (6.9%)

The City of Clearwater is filled with a wide variety of neighborhoods; residential enclaves that cater to all ages and income levels. These neighborhoods are safe places to walk, ride bikes, or to roller blade. They are ADA-compliant with wide, well-maintained sidewalks. Streets are tree-lined and shaded, and often connect the neighborhoods to retail centers, neighborhood services or parks and recreation facilities.



10 Efficient, Responsive City Services – 71 (6.1%)

The City of Clearwater strives to provide a broad range of city services in an increasingly effective and efficient manner. Even as costs increase, the City seeks to maintain, if not increase, its services by working more efficiently and more effectively, as a partner to citizens and neighborhoods alike.

11 Well Maintained Housing Stock in All Markets – 67 (5.7%)

Clearwater has a wide variety of residential options, suitable for people in all walks of life, all different types of households, and all income brackets. City leaders will place an emphasis on preserving and enhancing attainable housing. All housing here is well designed, well built and well maintained, and part of integral neighborhoods.

12 Efficient Transportation Systems – 63 (5.4%)

The City of Clearwater recognizes that residents and visitors need to be able to move about the City without mandatory access to a private automobile. The City has partnered with PSTA to help provide effective mass transit within the city limits, and has worked to make enclaves within the city ideal environments for pedestrians and bicyclists. A number of trails help link the City east and west and north and south.

13 Communication – 55 (4.7%)

People in the City of Clearwater talk to one another and to their elected officials. Neighborhood groups talk to other neighborhood groups, citizens talk to the government, and vice versa. The City takes pride in establishing and maintaining two-way dialogues throughout the community on all sorts of subjects of interest.

Analysis

The results of the community ranking indicates how accurate the Council was in selecting issues of broad concern. The highest of the 13 selections received 13.5% of the vote, while the last was less than 9 percentage points lower, at 4.7%. Clearly, there were elements of all the initiatives that appealed to some significant number of community members.

The gap between each of the first three choices was greater than one percentage point. For the next ten selections, however, the difference between a particular selection and the next higher or lower option was never more than 0.8%, and in several cases was 0.1%. Based on these numbers it would be incorrect to assume that any of the thirteen initiatives is clearly not deemed necessary to the future of the community. Instead, the ranking must be seen as indicating those initiatives and the concerns they embody that are seen as most important to the future of Clearwater.

The proposed initiative that received the most votes (13.5%) was for a **Safe, Clean, Green Environment**. This is not unexpected, based on the comments and concerns that were voiced at the various community workshops. What the ranking is unable to elaborate upon, however, is whether or not there was equal appreciation for all three elements of this initiative—"Safe," "Clean," and "Green"—or if one of the three clearly outweighed the other. Safety is clearly important to residents of the community – this was stated explicitly and implicitly during most of the meetings. Also, during the course of the workshops, there was clearly a steady concern with issues related to the environment, to sustainable development, to helping "green" the City of Clearwater. The notion of a "clean" city as presented in the initiative seems to follow directly from the notion of a "safe" city. As many communities have proven in the past decade, attending to little issues such as litter and graffiti tends to go hand in hand with a decrease in more critical criminal activities.



The second highest number of votes (10.8%) went to **A Quality Beach Environment**.

The second community workshop was held on Clearwater Beach. It was not unexpected that the highest ranked initiative at that meeting was for “A Quality Beach Environment.” However, if we control for the reasonable self-interest that might be expected from the Beach community and re-tabulate the rankings, omitting all of the results of this one workshop, the rankings barely change. Omitting the results of the Beach workshop, “Safe, Clean, Green Environment” is still the highest ranked priority, and “A Quality Beach Environment” still comes in second.

(For the record, “Economic Vitality and Reinvestment” moves up to number three, just behind the Beach and just ahead of “A Vibrant Downtown.” “Diverse Jobs,” “High Quality Education,” “Safe Neighborhoods” and “Well-Maintained Infrastructure” would all be in a virtual tie for fifth.)

This seems to reinforce the significant role that the Beach plays within the City as a whole. While it was often heard at some point during the workshops that the City puts too much of its energy and attention into the Beach, each of the workshops also saw strong expressions of concern about the Beach. These generally pointed out the importance of the Beach to both residents and visitors, spoke out in favor of or against the on-going redevelopment, and highlighted the problems with traffic and parking on the Beach. Regardless of position, it appears that a substantial number of residents of Clearwater regard the Beach as a critical element of the City.

The initiative that received the third highest number of votes (8.9%) was **A Vibrant Downtown that is Mindful of its Heritage**.

Possibly, there is even more mixed sentiment about the Downtown than about the Beach. Many respondents in the workshops noted the problems and weaknesses within the Downtown at present. Others noted the many opportunities for improvement. Within the individual workshops, the importance of Downtown varied by physical proximity. At the workshops held in communities close to the downtown, concern for improving the downtown was high. In other, more remote enclaves, the downtown was less of a concern.

The fourth-highest ranking (8.1%) was for a **Variety of Cultural and Recreational Offerings**.

As has become clear through all of the workshops and the analyses, residents of Clearwater are very interested in leisure-time activities, ranging from extremely active outdoor recreation such as boating or fishing, to more passive activities such as concerts, museums and libraries. Even as the workshops reveal that many people are happy with their options in these areas, they also would like to see more opportunities and facilities.

Finally, the fifth highest number of votes (7.7%) went to **High Quality Education**.

Clearly, education is an issue that appeals to many of the participants. As written, however, this initiative is very broad, and additional work, however, needs to be done to determine more closely the true interests of the community. It was pointed out at a number of workshops that the City does not have much control over K-12 education. This is the responsibility of the Pinellas County School Board, although the City does have some involvement with the Board related to the location and operation of schools within the City limits. St. Pete College was mentioned many times, as were the desire for additional continuing education classes for adults, both in the areas of additional technical training and as an opportunity for seniors and retirees.

This initiative specifically mentions the role of students in enlivening the Downtown. This area, too, needs to be more fully examined and fleshed-out to devise specific initiatives and programs to bring this to fruition.

Two other proposed initiatives came in immediately behind number five.



Economic Vitality and Reinvestment received 7.6% of the votes.

Again, this is an initiative that never got too high up in the voting, but with one exception was never too low, either. As stated, it describes support for locally-grown enterprises, and providing public support for private investments to assist in redevelopment. It also speaks to targeted revitalization. As stated, these are relevant, but generic; to become effective, this initiative requires additional study and development into a series of specific programs targeted at key issues within the community.

Well-Maintained Infrastructure received 7.5% of the votes.

As stated, this initiative covers the full range of infrastructure, including transportation, stormwater, water supply, and electronic infrastructure. In addition, public transportation was the focus of its own specific initiative (which came in twelfth out of thirteen options). Given the attention that was paid to infrastructure in almost every category of the SWOT analyses, support for this initiative was somewhat low. That may reflect the perception that traffic and road congestion are more properly the purview of the state or the country. It might reflect the relatively broad range of issues that were covered within the initiative. Despite its ranking towards the middle however, given the amount of attention paid to the issue of Infrastructure in other areas of the workshops, this initiative deserves further attention and analysis.

On-line Survey

The on-line survey is similar to the results of the community meetings, with a few differences. “Safe, Comfortable, Walkable Neighborhoods,” and “Well-Maintained Infrastructure” both came in higher on the on-line survey than at the community meetings. As such, they had some impact on the overall ranking of initiatives, if both sources of data are combined.

When combined, the first three initiatives remain the same as in the community meetings: Safe, Clean, Green Environment (1), A Quality Beach Environment (2), A Vibrant Downtown (3). Well-Maintained Infrastructure jumps to the fourth ranking, with High-Quality Education holding onto the fifth position. A Variety of Cultural & Recreational Offerings and Safe Comfortable Walkable Neighborhoods tie for sixth. Economic Vitality & Reinvestment falls from sixth to eight place.

Summary

The selected priorities give some insight into the concerns of the Citizens of Clearwater. Safety and effective infrastructure appear to be crucial concerns, particularly with respect to services such as police, fire and EMS.

The community clearly thinks of both the Beach and the Downtown as special places that belong to everyone in the City. In addition, the community appreciates Clearwater as a place with a wide-variety of cultural and recreational offerings.

At the same time, the results indicate that many in the community are thinking about the future, both in terms of economic aspects –jobs and wealth creation—and in terms of opportunities for young people to get good education and training.

