

Clearwater Community Redevelopment Agency
2021-2022 Strategy
Adopted January 19, 2021

Creating Sustainable Change in Downtown

Revitalizing a downtown is a long term, complex process at the intersection of community engagement, economic development and urban planning. The purpose of a Community Redevelopment Agency area is to restore the functioning of a private market. This is achieved by identifying the barriers to redevelopment and investing public dollars to remove or reduce them resulting in increased private investment. The largest and most persistent barrier to the redevelopment of downtown Clearwater is a negative perception of the downtown. This negative perception limits visitors to downtown and has a dampening effect on investment in downtown.

In May 2018, the CRA Trustees adopted a new Clearwater Downtown Redevelopment Plan which outlined a vision and goals to increase the attractiveness of downtown as a place to live, work and play. The redevelopment plan also established an operational framework and a capital improvements budget for the next 5-10 years. The 2018 vision states, “Downtown Clearwater will thrive as the urban core and heart of the City, as the center of business and government, and as an attractive place to live, work, shop and play. A revitalized Downtown will be achieved through quality urban design, continued creation of a high-quality public realm, and a dense and livable pattern which will strengthen the overall health of the City.”

The desired outcome of the 2021-2022 strategy is - ***to change the perceptions held by the public and investors about downtown Clearwater to one that aligns with the 2018 adopted vision.*** This outcome will be achieved through a series of activities under three primary focus areas and ongoing evaluation of CRA efforts.

Current Context

Since March 2020, there has been significant changes for the CRA including new trustees, the COVID-19 pandemic, a shift in the design of Imagine Clearwater to emphasize the live performance venue, and a new funding source through Pinellas County for workforce housing. Downtown businesses and City/CRA staff have responded to COVID 19 restrictions with creativity through the temporary closure of the 400-500 blocks of Cleveland Street and the restaurant voucher program, among other initiatives. The City has provided business assistance through emergency grant funding.

Over the next two years, there will be significant construction of public improvements throughout the CRA with Streetscape Phase III/Mercado in the Downtown Gateway and the waterfront redevelopment in the Downtown Core which will impact the accessibility and visibility of current businesses. There could be a referendum on the sale/lease of the bluff properties and the establishment of a conservancy which will need the support of Clearwater voters and donors to be successful. There will be increased County funding for workforce housing developments as well as the continuance of the Opportunity Zone federal tax benefits which could stimulate multi-family housing construction. Physical distancing impacts from COVID-19 will be in place through 2021, limiting in person special events and continuing the need to create new ways of gathering. Anticipating the impact of these factors is at the forefront of our

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planning for the next two years. We will adapt to ever evolving public health restrictions and market changes.

CRA 2020-2022 Strategy

The outcome of the 2021-2022 strategy is the same as the 2018 strategy - to shift the perception held by the public and investors about downtown to one that is positive and encourages investment. All the proposed CRA programs, capital improvement projects, and activities are designed to change the perception of downtown to show it is welcoming, arts infused, vibrant, diverse, and sustained by partnerships. The CRA relies on partnerships, through both City departments and external organizations, to bring the adopted vision for downtown to life. Commitment to a work program and funding priorities allows staff to successfully plan for multi-year projects and communicate potential CRA investments to its partners.

The work will be contained in three focus areas:

1. Creating and sharing positive, authentic stories about downtown Clearwater
2. Increasing investor confidence
3. Investing in placemaking and placekeeping

Each focus area includes a list of objectives and implementation activities that are aligned with the 2018 Downtown Plan and will achieve the desired outcome of shifting perceptions of downtown and the city. Activities are categorized as ongoing, underway or planned as of January 1, 2021 and intended to finish by December 31, 2022. Baseline metrics for each objective will be established in January 2021.

Focus Area One: Create and share authentic, positive stories about Downtown Clearwater

Objectives:

1.A. Increase the number and diversity of individuals and organizations producing community engagement activities and special events in downtown

1.B. Increase the overall audience size and audience engagement of the CRA's electronic communications channels

1.C. Establish a resident engagement program to build community-wide support for downtown redevelopment goals and businesses

Ongoing

- Host Downtown Clearwater website, social media channels and public meetings
- Implement an Editorial Strategy with three areas – local business success, vibrant public spaces and the role of the arts in revitalization

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- Implement 8 Social Media Campaigns - (short film contest, online public art tours, Downtown GIFs etc.)
- Provide full time staff dedicated to marketing and public relations

Underway

- Build local capacity for special events through partnership with Parks and Recreation Co-Sponsorship, event management agreement with Amplify Clearwater and marketing grants from Downtown Development Board
- Produce the Holiday Extravaganza event series annually in December
- Create a Restaurant Voucher Marketing Campaign

Planned

- Create a resident engagement strategy (e.g. Downtown Champions program)
- Provide marketing technical assistance contracts for businesses in CRA
- Conduct “Open for Business” marketing campaigns during Imagine Clearwater and Streetscape construction
- Analyze the perception of downtown in the print media and social media through sentiment analysis

Focus Area Two: Increase investor confidence

Objectives:

2.A. Attract \$50 million dollars in private investment

2.B. Approve development agreements for the sale or lease of a minimum of three CRA owned properties

2.C. Build operational capacity of a minimum of three downtown business/community advocacy organizations

2.D. Reduce the number of ground floor, vacant commercial buildings by 10%

Ongoing

- Staff the Downtown Development Board, which provides grants for special events and business assistance

Clearwater Community Redevelopment Agency
2021-2022 Strategy
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- Provide dedicated staff to assist small businesses in the CRA
- Provide CRA grant programs in the areas of façade improvements, housing construction, build out of vacant commercial spaces and other physical improvements to commercial properties
- Host a monthly CRA Business “Meet-up” program

Underway

- Publish a call for Letters of Interest for CRA owned properties
- Conduct a targeted marketing and public relations campaign for Opportunity Zone investors
- Publish RFPs (3) for CRA owned properties to attract residential, cultural, restaurant and retail uses
- Assist in the redevelopment of the Bluff properties as part of Imagine Clearwater
- Utilize the parking lot adjacent to The Nolen to support new restaurant/retail uses
- Provide Food and Drink grant program implementation

Planned

- Update the CRA implementation plan as part of the Downtown Redevelopment Plan updates in 2021
- Partner with the Planning Department and Economic Development/Housing Department to construct a “missing middle” housing project
- Create a “Welcome to Downtown Clearwater” business toolkit
- Design a capacity building program for downtown organizations (Ex. DCMA) to increase their ability to host events, attract tenants and sustain their businesses

Focus Area Three: Placemaking and Placekeeping

Objectives:

3.A. Complete identified capital improvement projects

3.B. Develop three signature placemaking programs with a focus on children, downtown employees and the intersection of art and technology

3.C. Improve the physical appearance of blighted residential and commercial properties

Ongoing

- Produce community engagement programs (Ex. Children’s Day)
- Fund public art programs (Murals, Art Installations, Augmented Reality etc.)
- Provide support for Clearwater Community Garden

Clearwater Community Redevelopment Agency
2021-2022 Strategy
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Underway

- Construction of Streetscape Phase III and the Mercado Plaza
- Construction of wayfinding signage
- Commission design for the Cleveland Street Lighting Project
- Provide COVID 19 compliant programming for the temporary closure of Cleveland Street
- Host Virtual Art Tours

Planned

- Design Pinellas Trail improvements
- Activate of Station Square
- Recruit cultural uses to downtown
- Create a comprehensive codes enforcement and rehabilitation program for residential properties