

DRAFT
Clearwater Community Redevelopment Agency
2020-2022 Strategy

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 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 potential 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 2020-2022 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 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 these challenges with creativity through the temporary closure of the 400-500 blocks of Cleveland Street and the restaurant voucher program among other initiatives.

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 Spring 2021 limiting in person special events continuing the need to create new ways of gathering. Anticipating the impact of these factors is at the forefront of our planning for the next two years.

CRA 2020-2022 Strategy

The outcome of the 2020-2022 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, both City departments and external organizations, to bring

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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 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 October 1, 2020 and planned to finish by December 2022.

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

Ongoing

- Downtown Clearwater website, social media channels and public meetings
- Editorial Strategy with three areas – local business success, vibrant public spaces and the role of the arts in revitalization
- Social Media Campaigns (8) - (short film contest, online public art tours, Downtown GIFs etc.)
- Full time staff dedicated to marketing and public relations

Underway

- Building 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
- Producing the Holiday Extravaganza event series annually in December
- Restaurant Voucher Marketing Campaign

Planned

- Downtown Champions program

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- Marketing technical assistance contracts for businesses in CRA
- “Open for Business” marketing campaigns during Imagine Clearwater and Streetscape construction
- Sentiment Analysis

Focus Area: Increase investor confidence

Ongoing

- Staff the Downtown Development Board which provides grants for special events and business assistance
- 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
- 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
- Complete a utility study for the Downtown Core
- Utilizing the parking lot adjacent to The Nolen to support new restaurant/retail uses
- Food and Drink grant program implementation

Planned

- 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: Placemaking and Placekeeping

Ongoing

- Community Engagement Programs (Ex. Children’s Day)
- Public art programs (Murals, Art Installations, Augmented Reality etc.)

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- Support for Clearwater Community Garden

Underway

- Construction of Streetscape Phase III and the Mercado Plaza
- Wayfinding signage
- Cleveland Street Lighting Project
- Programming for the temporary closure of Cleveland Street
- Virtual Art Tour

Planned

- Pinellas Trail improvements
- Activation of Station Square
- Recruiting cultural uses to downtown
- Comprehensive codes enforcement and rehabilitation program for residential properties