



## Legislation Text

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### **SUBJECT/RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) strategy that outlines the CRA's work program from January 2021 through December 2022.

### **SUMMARY:**

The purpose of this item is to present the amended January 2021 - December 2022 Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) implementation strategy for adoption. At the September 2020 CRA meeting, the Trustees reviewed the proposed strategy and requested that staff identify specific objectives like the 2018 strategy and performance measures. The strategy has been revised to include the requested items which will be presented at the meeting. For reference, the September 2020 staff report summarizing the strategy has been included below.

#### September 2020 Staff Report

Revitalizing a downtown is a long term, complex process at the intersection of community engagement, economic development and urban planning. The CRA relies on partnerships, 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.

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 2018 redevelopment plan also established an operational framework and capital improvements budget for the next 5-10 years. On October 29, 2018, the CRA trustees adopted a more detailed 18-month implementation strategy to guide the short-term work of CRA staff and investments. The strategy had one main outcome, "*to shift the perceptions held by the public and investors about city government and downtown Clearwater to one that aligns with the 2018 adopted vision.*" This strategy had four objectives; each objective contained a variety of tasks:

- \* Creating and sharing authentic, positive stories about Downtown Clearwater
- \* Beginning construction on Imagine Clearwater
- \* Permitting 600 housing units
- \* Attracting \$100 million dollars of private investment

The CRA was able to achieve significant progress in each area, including a shift in operations to prioritize marketing, beautifying public spaces and providing new signature events. RFPs were issued for three CRA owned sites and seven food and drink grants were awarded. The CRA hosted the "Dreams of Dali" virtual reality exhibition for six months attracting over 4,600 visitors to downtown and winning an "Best of Bay" award. The 15% design was completed for Imagine Clearwater as well as the Harborview Center was demolished. However, during this time very few housing units were constructed and there was little private investment. This was primarily due to the lack of investor confidence in downtown's ability to attract customers/residents, the difficulty of obtaining financing to construct multi-story housing and the CRA's limited network of potential investors.

This year has brought 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 an essential part of our planning for the next two years. It is vital that the CRA keep downtown at the forefront of our residents' and visitors' minds to sustain current businesses and build up patrons for future ones.

The outcome of the proposed strategy is the same at the 2018 strategy - to change 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 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

The plan lists the proposed activities for each focus area as well as how we will measure our success. Highlights include new business assistance grant programs, identifying "Downtown Champions" to bring their ideas to life in downtown, the redevelopment of CRA owned properties with housing, public art projects and increased marketing efforts to target developers. Staff has created momentum over the past two years and are poised to continue the ongoing transformation of downtown. Staff looks forward to the Trustees' feedback and guidance on this approach.