

Technical Assistance Plan

City of Port St. Lucie, Florida

August 28, 2024

City's TCTA Request

Port St. Lucie's initial Thriving Communities technical assistance (TA) request focused on support related to advance planning for the City Hall complex and Intermodal Hub. However, since the original submission, several factors have influenced a shift in the City's goals for the TA. First, a Master Plan for the Intermodal Hub has been completed in collaboration with the St. Lucie County transit agency. Also, a regional Housing Needs Assessment has been completed, highlighting the need for workforce housing throughout the City. As a result, City staff have indicated a desire to broaden the focus of technical assistance from the redevelopment of the City Hall complex to support regarding (a) prioritizing Housing Needs Assessment action items and (b) community engagement activities that build support for their implementation.

HUD Thriving Communities technical assistance will help Port St. Lucie staff effectively engage members of the public and property developers and develop an action plan for addressing the housing challenges identified in the Housing Needs Assessment, with a particular focus on ensuring the availability of housing for working families near existing or planned transportation hubs, near job centers, or in other areas with good transportation access to local and regional job centers.

Demographic Information

Port St. Lucie is a rapidly growing city of 120 square miles with a current population of approximately 245,000. The City's population grew by more than 36,000 residents between 2020 and 2024 and it is now one of the fastest growing cities in the country. The population is expected to grow to about 450,000 residents by 2045. As of 2022, the City had a median household income of approximately \$75,000.

Some 91 percent of housing units in Port St. Lucie are single-family, with a homeownership rate of 82 percent. Nearly all the parcels developed in recent years have been for single family detached units and many existing parcels are entitled for that use but not yet built. Housing within the City has traditionally been considered affordable, particularly in comparison to neighboring counties, but housing costs have been increasing rapidly as the population has grown. Median home sales prices have increased by 80 percent over the past five years, from \$222,000 in January 2019 to \$399,450 in January 2024. Insurance costs have also risen sharply throughout Florida, increasing pressure on housing affordability.

Only four percent of the City's total land area is zoned for commercial development and one percent for industrial use. This limited land availability contributes to a lack of local employment opportunities. Commercial uses are often immediately adjacent to single-family housing. Some 60 percent of the City's working population commutes to other jurisdictions for work.

Ongoing initiatives

The City has requested TCTA in the context of several on-going and proposed initiatives that serve as a foundation for the City's efforts to achieve its planning and development goals, as discussed in the Existing Conditions Report. These initiatives include:

- **Housing Needs Assessment** – the study was undertaken jointly with St. Lucie County and the neighboring City of Fort Pierce to quantify and analyze housing supply and affordability issues in the three jurisdictions. The report includes goals related to housing supply, diversity and affordability and offers recommendations under each goal. The report will be presented to Port St. Lucie City Council (for acceptance) in August or September 2024.
- **Strategic Plan Update** – the City's updated strategic plan for the coming year has recently been completed and includes reference to housing incentives, including development of workforce housing, for the first time. A recent community survey showed that only 18 percent of Port St. Lucie residents indicated that sufficient affordable housing units are available. The reference to workforce housing initiatives in the strategic plan indicates that the City should "partner with housing developers to support the City's workforce" and is shown as a priority project under Goal 4: Diverse Economy & Employment Opportunities Expand Job Opportunities and Support Economic Development. The update to the plan was approved by City Council in late July, 2024.
- **RAISE Grant** – the Port St. Lucie Department of Transportation is currently processing the City's \$2 million RAISE planning grant, awarded in 2023 for improvements to the Village Green Drive corridor. The City will hire a design firm to implement the grant-funded activities and plans extensive outreach.
- **Comprehensive Plan Update** – the City is currently in the process of hiring a planning consultant to assist in a full update of its comprehensive plan, including the housing element as required by state law. The plan will include population and development projections through 2045.
- **Intermodal Hub** – the City has worked with St. Lucie County Area Regional Transit (ART) to complete a master plan for the intermodal transit hub adjacent to the City Hall complex.
- **City Center project** – the City has adopted a master plan for this mixed-use redevelopment project in the City's older, eastern corridor and hopes to introduce increased housing density as an element of this project. Rebranding of the project is currently underway.
- **Work Local** - The City has partnered with St. Lucie County on the Work Local Initiative, which sponsors local job fairs and provides information on small businesses and employment opportunities in the County.

In addition to these specific initiatives, the City maintains a strong communications function, providing extensive information to residents through the City's website and social media. The City reports good participation at neighborhood and community events and increasing engagement with the many community/homeowners' associations. However, the City has not previously attempted a public engagement campaign concerning topics as complex as the housing development process or the potential benefits of increased density.

City Goals

The proposed TA plan focuses on helping the City achieve two foundational goals:

GOAL 1 – Develop and Implement Effective Communications Strategies:

The City seeks to more effectively communicate its planning and development challenges and strategies to the public, increasing public understanding of the City’s development process and housing affordability issues. The City also wishes to create proactive and productive relationships with property developers and home builders to shape the future of residential and mixed-use development in the city.

GOAL 2 – Support the Adoption and Implementation of Affordable Housing Strategies:

The City seeks to promote solutions to the City’s identified housing needs by prioritizing and implementing actions found in the regional Housing Needs Assessment Implementation Matrix, including policies and incentives that promote affordable and workforce housing.

Proposed TA Activities

GOAL 1 – Develop and Implement of Effective Communications Strategies:

A. Communicating the Development Process and Affordability Issues:

Land development is a complex process involving a range of overlapping land use, transportation, environmental, and legal issues. Land development in Port St. Lucie has traditionally focused on low-density, single-family development, which limits housing variety and may contribute to worsening housing affordability in the City. Technical Assistance will support the City in planning and executing public outreach that helps residents to better understand the land development process, as well as the role of housing unit variety, workforce housing, and other development strategies in ensuring housing affordability. While Port St. Lucie has studied potential affordability strategies, community engagement and education are necessary precursors to regulatory or other program changes.

Using examples, best practices, and strategic guidance, TA providers will support City staff in developing an engagement strategy document, including plans for how to conduct outreach, groups to contact or focus on, tone of communication, and frequency of outreach. TA providers will provide support for City development of outreach materials that may include model language, presentations, graphics, handouts, or web content to convey the development process, as well as potential solutions to growth and affordability challenges such as infill development, increased housing density, new and innovative housing types, accessory dwelling units, mixed-use development, and more. The resulting engagement strategy and materials will focus on supporting community understanding of the development regulatory process, market dynamics at work in Port St. Lucie, physical requirements of growth and land development in the City, and existing land development entitlements.

Milestones

- *Assessment of existing communications and engagement programming*
- *Delivery of outreach strategy examples and best practices*

- *City-led creation of outreach strategy document*
- *Delivery of example communications and engagement graphics, presentations, and other materials*
- *City-led creation of outreach materials*
- *Delivery of model engagement activities for staff training*

Outcomes

- *Increased capacity of City staff, elected, and appointed leaders to engage residents on land development and affordability issues.*
- *Increased community acceptance of density, mixed-use, new residential unit types, and other affordability concepts.*

B. Communications with Property Developers: The fact that much of Port St. Lucie’s undeveloped land is already entitled and owned by private developers means that the cooperation of private real estate development partners will be critical in any future change to the city’s housing market and affordability. The city has not traditionally pursued collaborative relationships with housing developers. Technical assistance will support city staff in increasing efforts to build an understanding of developer perspectives on market forces, demand for new residential unit types, density, mixed-use, and more, as well as to build developers’ understanding of the City’s growth vision, infrastructure challenges, and other issues. Additionally, TA providers will research and connect city staff with regional and nationwide developers and development examples that represent new housing products and densities to Port St. Lucie. TA providers will conduct developer interviews discussing housing products being proposed for new development and the potential for new products, including multi-family, attached housing, mixed-use, accessory dwelling units, and more, as well as identification of regulatory or other barriers to new development types. TA providers will use this information to help inform recommendations to the City about how to structure their engagement with developers.

Milestones

- *Outreach and interviews with local development interests*
- *Identification and outreach to regional and nationwide development innovators*

Outcomes

- *Increased capacity of City staff, elected, and appointed leaders to engage developers in proactive planning.*
- *Identification of promising development models or products, as well as regulatory barriers to implementation.*

Proposed TA Activities

GOAL 2 – Support Adoption and Implementation of Affordable Housing Strategies:

A. Workforce Housing Incentives and Policy Models: As one of the three sponsoring jurisdictions of the regional Housing Needs Assessment, Port St. Lucie is committed to identifying and prioritizing implementation strategies to address some of the City’s identified housing needs. One such identified need is the promotion or preservation of adequate workforce housing

affordable to lower-income but employed residents. In that regard, in its most recent annual Strategic Plan, the City has included, for the first time, the potential for providing incentives for workforce housing development. Technical Assistance will support City staff by identifying sample ordinances and other tools that may incentivize the development of more affordable workforce housing units. The TA team would also help the City identify the revisions that may be needed to current processes and procedures to advance the implementation of such incentives and ultimately, more affordable development.

Milestones

- *Research on sample ordinances and related incentives for affordable workforce development*
- *Identification of proposed incentives most appropriate to the Port St. Lucie context.*
- *Provision of recommendations on implementation of identified incentives*

Outcomes

- *Increased knowledge of City staff, elected and appointed leaders regarding workforce/affordable housing development incentives*
- *Increased awareness of requirements for implementing incentives and potential barriers*