

# Case Study: The City of Palm Beach Gardens' Vision and Framework for a Transit-Oriented Future

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The City of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, and the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC)—the planning organization for the Treasure Coast region—are exhibiting leadership in advancing mobility, accessibility, and housing options in Southeast Florida.

This case study highlights the policy, public engagement, and multi-jurisdictional coordination tools leveraged to bring transit-oriented development (TOD) to housing, land use, and transportation planning in Palm Beach Gardens. Its TOD policies and plans aim to reshape existing neighborhoods and future development around transit hubs to create more walkable, vibrant, and sustainable communities. The City of Palm Beach Gardens is working to transform its suburban, car-centered community into an active and accessible hub of diversified land use and bustling urban centers.

## Background and Demographics

The City of Palm Beach Gardens is in Southeast Florida along the Atlantic coast, with a population of approximately 60,000 residents. The area has experienced steady population growth over the past decade due to its popular location just north of West Palm Beach, residents' quality of life, and the area's natural and built amenities. Forecasts show incoming populations to be primarily in the 65+ age group. The primarily suburban community is characterized by single-family housing in residential communities and well-maintained recreational spaces. The City of Palm Beach Gardens is approximately 60 square miles and has a population of approximately 60,000. The City is within Palm Beach County, one of the four counties in the Treasure Coast Region: Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, and Palm Beach, which cover 3,589 square miles with a metropolitan area population of over 2 million.

### PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- A TOD Master Plan was established in 2018 to guide future development priorities.
- The City plans to build out mixed-used development around transit station areas.
- Diversifying land uses will help establish more workforce housing options.

### IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

- The TOD Master Plan development was funded through a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).
- A comprehensive public involvement effort led to the emergence of TOD principles as an area priority.
- Openness and flexibility in local codes help promote TOD and redevelopment projects.

In the early 2000s, city officials and planners identified the need to create job opportunities, accessible and affordable housing options, and diversify the community's tax base. These needs required a new vision for mobility and economic development, which ultimately led the City to consider and begin to implement the TOD principles.

## Creating a Transit-Oriented Planning Culture

### Citizens' Vision for Development

In 2009, Palm Beach Gardens, in conjunction with TCRPC, created an opportunity for citizens to provide feedback on the future developments and development needs of the City. The City and TCRPC encouraged residents to weigh in on items such as buildings' height, housing and population density, and overall community feel. These conversations illuminated the community's desire for improved accessibility and walkability in the area, which motivated City and TCRPC planners to consider how to better integrate transit into the future of the urban core's design. The comprehensive planning effort, titled the [Citizens' Master Plan](#), solicited input from residents, interest groups, business owners, and other stakeholders on the future of the City of Palm Beach Gardens.

### Establishing a Regional TOD Master Plan

In 2017, a \$150,000 FTA Pilot Program for TOD Planning grant was awarded to Palm Beach Gardens by way of the South Florida Regional Transit Authority. In the same year, PBG entered into an interagency agreement with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC) to coordinate planning activities in the development of a TOD Plan.<sup>1</sup> The grant funding enabled the City to adapt the Citizens' Master Plan into a comprehensive and strategic framework for future TOD, culminating in the City's first [TOD Master Plan](#). Components of the TOD Master Plan include land use pattern recommendations, strategies to improve mobility, market analysis to inform recommendations, and a roadmap for promoting public input throughout these processes. The TOD Master Plan was officially completed and published in 2018 and acted as a guiding vision for the development community before becoming officially codified in 2020<sup>2</sup> and 2022<sup>3</sup>.

### Promoting Connectivity through Transit

Incorporating TOD principles throughout the City of Palm Beach Gardens requires coordination across multiple jurisdictions including the City, County, and TCRPC. Although each agency comes to the table with its own priorities, there are opportunities to move beyond automobile centered solutions to create multimodal infrastructure and mixed-used development. Developers and investors saw a clear direction for the place and a clear vision and roadmap. Early in the planning process, before policies were codified, they submitted applications for development and redevelopment. The City has a flexible zoning code that enabled this to move forward prior to adoption of the plan. Since adoption, the planning department continues to receive calls from developers on potential plans for development that follow the vision set forth in the plan.

With the establishment of the TOD Master Plan, the City of Palm Beach Gardens is focusing on retrofitting transportation infrastructure to improve public transit, including the implementation of new

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<sup>1</sup> [Resolution 45-17 - Transit Oriented Development Grant Program \(pbgfl.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pbgfl.com/DocumentCenter/View/14740/Ordinance-10-2020-CPTA-for-TOD?bidId=>

<sup>3</sup> [Ordinance 10-22 - Amending Chapter 78 Section 78-222 Transit Oriented Development \(TOD\) Overlay District \(pbgfl.com\)](#)

station areas for the Tri-Rail commuter rail line that links Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach in Florida. One of these station areas will be a [Tri-Rail](#) coastal project, acting as both a commuter train and a regional connector. There is also potential for a Brightline passenger rail system station, which now connects to Orlando, in addition to the cities noted above. Creating these station areas can help create visibility for the existing housing, businesses, and amenities surrounding the Master Plan area, promote internal roadway connections, and encourage the build-out of future development around the station area.

### [TOD Projects in Development](#)

To align with the TOD Master Plan and further emphasize a new development standard for the region, the City of Palm Beach Gardens began changing its ordinances to accommodate TOD principles. For example, the City increased the height maximums stipulated in building codes, allowing for design concepts that included housing as well as more green space on the ground or on rooftops. The City's more flexible zoning code encouraged developers to submit development and redevelopment projects aligned with the TOD principles for the greatest public benefit. Some of the earliest and most notable TOD projects include:

- The new major NextEra Energy/Florida Power and Light Office Center (an employment center of up to 1 million square feet – 270,000 of which is already constructed) with LEED-certified features and hazard resilience elements;
- Demolition of commercial office buildings near the PGA Office Center redeveloped to include 396 multifamily housing units including 40 workforce housing units, with an additional 620 multifamily housing units (62 reserved as workforce housing units) under review; and,
- A site in downtown Palm Beach Gardens redeveloped for mixed use to include a hotel and residential units (280 multi-family housing units), vibrant public spaces, and public art installations.

### [Addressing Rising Costs of Living](#)

Another motivator for integrating TOD into the region's planning effort involves the area's rapidly rising housing prices. To combat housing affordability issues, the City ensured the availability of workforce housing was a priority in the Master Plan. Palm Beach Gardens created an incentive-based program for planning workforce housing that expedites permitting, incentivizes TOD principles, and provides density bonuses for the construction of housing within the TOD areas in development and elsewhere around the city. The program aims to establish Palm Beach Gardens as a place that proactively provides for working residents' needs.

### [Public Engagement and Stakeholder Collaboration](#)

Throughout the TOD Master Plan development process, city planners held interviews with key stakeholders and provided opportunities for public participation from community members across the region. City planners found that many different types of partners wanted to engage in the process, from the area's business associations and chambers of commerce to advocacy groups. FTA Pilot Program for TOD Planning grant funds were used to host a number of charettes and meetings to understand citizens' concerns as well as their hopes for the future of the region's development. City leadership played a critical role in championing and encouraging the integration of TOD into local land use and transportation planning efforts.

## Next Steps

Looking forward, TOD planning efforts in Palm Beach Gardens are expected to maintain momentum and continue to include diverse perspectives. Managing increasing density and population within the area will be important to ensure that development standards for other planned projects are successful. For example, traffic congestion can be an early outcome of increasing density. City planners anticipate that managing expectations or coordinating closely with the community and other stakeholders will be critical to keeping the public informed and engaged as the region moves toward more diversified forms of mobility. The City hopes to approach housing, land use, and transportation through a TOD lens in the years to come and to expand the boundaries of TOD development in the region for the benefit of all residents.

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## Resources

[Resolution 45-17 - Transit Oriented Development Grant Program \(pbgfl.com\)](#)

[Ordinance 10, 2020: Amendments to the Future Land Use Element of the City's Comprehensive Plan to Incorporate a Transit-Oriented Development \(TOD\) Objective and TOD Policies](#)

[Ordinance 16, 2019: Mobility Plan and Mobility Fee Technical Report](#)

[Ordinance 19, 2019: Mobility Fee-related LDR Amendment](#)

[2020 Ordinance – Text Update to TOD](#)

[Ordinance 10-22 - Amending Chapter 78 Section 78-222 Transit Oriented Development \(TOD\) Overlay District \(pbgfl.com\)](#)

[Mobility in the Gardens](#)

[Palm Beach Gardens TOD Master Plan](#)

