Project Introduction

Each of the three August community meetings began with a brief presentation designed to introduce the Imagine Clearwater master planning process. The consultant team began the presentation by noting that Clearwater has a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop a transformative vision for its ~50-acre downtown waterfront. For the purposes of this study, this includes open space, as well as public and private uses, hereby referred to as the “downtown waterfront.” In doing so, the team explained, Clearwater will follow in the footsteps of dozens of cities nationwide that have designed and implemented waterfront revitalization strategies and have realized sweeping improvements to the health and vibrancy of their downtown economies. Over the past five years, cities in the Tampa Bay Area have also made downtown waterfront transformations a key component of their planning initiatives – Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Bradenton all have major open space-focused waterfront projects in varying stages of completion.

The team highlighted the site’s existing strengths, which present the city with a tremendous opportunity to rethink the future of its waterfront, improve its connection to downtown, and create a vibrant destination for all. Over the next several months, the team and the City will continue to conduct extensive community outreach and public meetings during key decision-making milestones.

At the end of the master planning process, the team will present a draft master plan to the community and City leadership that creates a vision for and guides future redevelopment and improvements within the Waterfront/Bluff area. The plan will include two main components:

- **A Framework Plan**, which consists of a site plan, a strategy for access, circulation, and parking, and recommendations for open space and public realm improvements; and,

- **An Action Plan**, which will provide a road map for implementing the plan through a strategy for key partnerships, phasing, and funding opportunities.

Discussion

Following the introductory presentation, participants were invited to participate in small discussion groups of 8 to 10 people for a 45-minute facilitator-led discussion session, followed by a 20-minute period dedicated to reporting back on the main topics of conversation. Participants were encouraged to focus their conversation around three primary questions, each of which received a range of responses as summarized below:

- **What should the role of the waterfront be?**
  - The waterfront should be an active, welcoming gathering space for the Clearwater community
  - Coachman Park and the surrounding district should be Clearwater’s family room
  - Public access is key to the waterfront becoming the heart of Downtown

- **How can we foster a sense of place?**
Splash pads and play areas for children will help establish the waterfront as a family-friendly destination.

Art installations and cultural programming can make the waterfront livelier and give it a distinctly local flavor.

The new design should emphasize the uniqueness of the Bluff and the natural beauty of the Intracoastal Waterway.

**How can we better connect to Clearwater?**

- Pedestrian access from Downtown to the water should be made easy, attractive, and safe.
- The Pinellas Trail should be connected directly to the waterfront.
- Improved signage should be installed to guide people to the waterfront and help them get around it.
- Sensible and well-designed parking solutions should be prioritized, but not at the expense of pedestrian access and various transit-based solutions.

The consultant team collected public comments by a variety of means: facilitators took written notes throughout their sessions and in the subsequent table-by-table discussion summaries; participants were handed sheets of paper on which they were asked to write out their thoughts during the session, all of which were collected at the end of the meeting. Thoughts generated by members of the community during the three meetings can be grouped under six themes:

- **A space for the community.** While visitors should feel welcome at the waterfront, the space should be primarily for the people of Clearwater and should be designed and programmed as such;
- **Identity/Authenticity.** The space should evoke a sense of place – it should be shaped by Clearwater’s identity and in turn shape its future brand;
- **Dynamic functions.** The waterfront should be active at all times, and the design must accommodate a wide variety of year-round uses attractive to a diverse pool of users;
- **Natural features.** A key part of what makes the waterfront special is its natural beauty, which should be enhanced through targeted design interventions and activation;
- **Connectivity.** Access to the site can feel unsafe, unreliable, and inconvenient depending on use and traffic conditions – everyone from pedestrians to cyclists, boaters and motorists should feel comfortable visiting the waterfront without having to worry about impediments to their access;
- **Downtown vibrancy.** Any reconfiguration of the waterfront must support the goal of creating a more active and attractive downtown to ensure its sustainability.
Draft Vision and Guiding Principles

Following the meetings, the consultant team reviewed all meeting and other participant notes and feedback and distilled from them a draft overarching vision statement and set of guiding principles structured around the themes that emerged from the three sessions. As described in the Next Steps section below, the following draft vision statement and associated principles will be presented to the community for feedback in a set of community meetings scheduled for mid-September.

Draft Vision Statement
The downtown Clearwater waterfront will be an active, authentic, and iconic civic and open space that celebrates Clearwater’s natural beauty, culture, and diversity and anchors an economically vibrant downtown.

Draft Guiding Principles

• **Community-Driven.** The waterfront as a whole will become the heart of the Clearwater community, a civic gathering space designed for diverse residents of all ages and backgrounds to enjoy.

• **Authentic.** The city’s authentic identity will be celebrated in the waterfront and bluff’s design and programming, building on the district’s unique features such as its connections to the water, scenic sunset views, unique elevation changes, and Coachman Park’s popular community and cultural events. The waterfront will be a symbol of the city and showcase and strengthen Clearwater’s brand.

• **Dynamic.** The waterfront will be actively programmed to enable year-round and all-day usage. A variety of design elements and recreational amenities such as splash pads, art installations, concert facilities, improved lighting, food and art markets, recreational equipment, native shade trees, food and beverage concessions, and cultural programming will ensure the widespread enjoyment of the waterfront.

• **Natural.** The waterfront will be reimagined to enable welcoming and safe public access to its unique and beautiful natural amenities. Landscaped pathways along the Intracoastal Waterway will be combined with interactive design elements to connect visitors to the water’s edge. Views of the water from the iconic Bluff will be preserved and enhanced, and native vegetation will be introduced to provide comfortable shade.

• **Connected.** Safe, convenient, reliable and multi-modal links will be provided between the waterfront and the rest of Clearwater. Pedestrians will enjoy comfortable, well-lit and shaded paths between the waterfront and the downtown core, enhanced with clear and attractive signage. Links to the Pinellas Trail will be enhanced and vehicular access will be provided in a manner consistent with the urban design and programming goals for the site.

• **Economically Vital.** As the centerpiece of downtown Clearwater, a redesigned waterfront will be a catalyst for a more vibrant, mixed-use downtown that is an attractive place to live, work, and play, contributing to Clearwater’s economic and fiscal wellbeing.
Next Steps

The second round of large-scale public engagement activities will take place on September 12th and 13th, with two community events in different sections of the city. At this next set of community meetings, we plan to:

- Solicit feedback on the master plan’s draft vision statement and guiding principles;
- Present the team’s interim framework plan concepts, which will include alternatives for the waterfront’s future as they relate to open space, access, and activation.