

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### TELEPHONE SURVEY OF HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

## TELEPHONE SURVEY OF HOMEOWNER'S ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

The MPO's general planning consultant interviewed the officers of several homeowner's and neighborhood associations in an effort to determine whether issues reported in the press and by individual survey respondents were indicative of a "silent majority" or a "vocal minority." Some general indications of the importance of any issue to a group of residents are whether an issue was discussed at an association board meeting and whether the association took any further action to resolve the matter.

The study team conducted a ten-question directed telephone survey of association officers to evaluate the trail-related impacts on surrounding residential areas. The sample size of the survey is too small for statistical analysis, but the responses of participants do yield helpful insights into perceptions of the trail.

### A. Survey Methodology

To adequately assess the trail's impact on neighborhoods, eight neighborhood association officers were interviewed by telephone during the fall of 2000. The respondents were interviewed using the survey instrument shown in *Exhibit 5.1*. Certain questions on the Homeowner's Association Officers (HOA) survey intentionally resembled questions from the residents' survey. In particular, the HOA Officers survey asked respondents for their opinions about trail-adjacent property crime, privacy, noise, loitering, and other issues. Additional questions were added to gauge whether officers had discussed the Pinellas Trail or taken any action regarding concerns about trail-related impacts on their neighborhood. It should be noted that the survey size is inadequate for a quantitative analysis and this survey is considered qualitative in nature.

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*Exhibit 5.1: Pinellas HOA Officer Survey*

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1. How long have you served on the Homeowner's Association Board for this neighborhood?
    - a. Fewer than 5 years
    - b. 5 years or more
  2. Do you like the Pinellas Trail? Yes/No
  3. Is the Pinellas Trail an asset to the neighborhood/ community? If so, how?
  4. Have any of the following types of trail-related concerns been discussed by the Homeowner's Association Board during your tenure (if no, skip to question 8)?

Yes/No	Yes/No
a. Crime/ safety/ security?	d. Nuisance/loitering?
b. Privacy?	e. Other?
c. Noise?	
  5. What action, if any, did the Homeowner's Association Board take in response to these concerns?

Yes/No	Yes/No
a. Called the police department? further?	d. Discussed matter
b. Set up community watch?	e. Formed a study committee?
c. Installed sign or fence?	f. No action taken?
  6. Of the issues discussed at recent Home Owner's Association Meetings, which issues were most important to the following neighborhood groups?  
Crime/Privacy/Noise/Loitering/Other
    - a. All property owners
    - b. Many property owners
    - c. Owners of first and second tier lots
    - d. Owners of abutting properties
    - e. Only a few owners
    - f. One owner
  7. Please rank the importance of recently discussed trail-related concerns to the HOA Board as a whole?  
(Use 1 to indicate most important and 5 as least important)

a. Crime/ safety/ security?	d. Nuisance/loitering?
b. Privacy?	e. Other?
c. Noise?	
  8. Do you use the Pinellas Trail for any of the following activities?

a. To commute to work	e. To shop or eat out
b. To travel to school	f. To exercise
c. To visit a friend / socialize	g. Other (please describe and rank
d. To visit a park / recreate	
  9. How would you rate the Pinellas Trail's impact on property values in your neighborhood?
    - a. Increased property values significantly
    - b. Increased property values somewhat
    - c. No change
    - d. Decreased property values somewhat
    - e. Decreased property values significantly
    - f. No opinion/ not sure
  10. How would you suggest that the Pinellas Trail be changed or improved?
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## B. Response Rates

The Pinellas County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) compiled a list of eleven (11) homeowner's or neighborhood associations located within the four market areas shown in *Map 2.1: Market Areas*. Eight HOA officers were ultimately contacted and interviewed (as listed below). During the survey, the respondent was asked whether there were other HOA officers who should be interviewed about the trail. The only HOAs mentioned by survey respondents were already on the contact list prepared by the MPO.

### Exhibit 5.2: Homeowners' Association Contact List

*Gayle Sims  
Childs Park Neighborhood  
Association  
4336 Fairfield Ave. S.  
St. Petersburg, FL 33711*

*Mort Sherman  
Crossroads Area Homeowners Assoc.  
6723-14<sup>th</sup> Ave. N.  
St. Petersburg, FL 33710-5405*

*David Archie  
Citizen's Alliance for Progress  
P.O. Box 295  
Tarpon Springs, FL 34688-0295*

*Sharon Colfert  
Holiday Village Association  
6580 Seminole Blvd., #320  
Seminole, FL 33772*

*Julie Martin  
Jungle Terrace Civic Association  
7101-36<sup>th</sup> Avenue North  
St. Petersburg, FL 33710*

*Kathryn Wilmot  
Crystal Bay Travel Park, Inc.  
2002 Ketch Circle  
Palm Harbor, FL 34683*

*Tasker Beal  
Friends of Ridgecrest  
1731 Taylor Lake Park  
Largo, FL 33778*

*Guy Keirn  
Park Street Neighborhood Association  
7535-3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. N.  
St. Petersburg, FL 33710*

## C. Survey Instrument

The initial survey questions were introductory in nature and included to put the respondent at ease while allowing for open-ended responses. For example, the HOA officers were asked how long they had served on the association board and whether they personally liked the trail. For the most part, the respondents had served on the association boards for fewer than five years and enjoyed using the Pinellas Trail. While many of the officers stated that they felt the Pinellas Trail was an asset to their neighborhood/community, they were hard-pressed to

articulate the basis for that conclusion other than many of their neighbors use it. They were also unable to articulate supporting information in conjunction comments concerning insufficient landscaping, buffering, and maintenance along the older segments of the Pinellas Trail. The following survey instrument was used to conduct a directed interview with the representatives of eight HOAs to evaluate their perceptions regarding the impact of the trail on their neighborhoods.

#### **D. Survey Responses**

Three respondents said that their boards had not discussed the Pinellas Trail or trail-related concerns. Two respondents stated that they felt that there were “two different trails.” They asserted that one trail that was “an ugly concrete sidewalk on an old rail bed” and the other was lushly landscaped and well maintained. They believed amenities, or lack thereof, were based on community prestige.

Five respondents said that their boards had discussed the Pinellas Trail. The chief concern was crime/safety/security issues. Two neighborhoods only discussed crime and had no other trail-related concerns. Of the three others, two were concerned about loitering and amenities/landscaping while another discussed privacy. Emotions ran high concerning the existence of attractive landscaping, consistent provision of amenities, amount of buffering and the quality of landscape maintenance. This point was echoed in the recommended improvements portion of the survey. Additionally, several officers had specific questions about pedestrian overpasses and they were directed to speak with the MPO staff.

Some respondents said that contacting the police was a very effective means of addressing neighborhood concerns about crime along the trail while others said that it was extremely ineffective. Three associations contacted their Community Policing Officer (CPO) to report crime problems. One of the three, the Friends of Ridgecrest, set up a community watch and installed a fence to address crime, safety or security issues. Their representative stated that contacting the CPO was highly effective and “took care of the problem.” The other two

respondents said that they have contacted their CPO without results. When the issue of police responsiveness was scrutinized, it was found that if a homeowner's association was primarily concerned about crime, then the police responded effectively. Conversely, if the chief concerns were loitering, graffiti and potential criminal activity, then the police were limited in their ability to respond. The respondents confirmed this by saying that police could not eliminate loitering, graffiti, and "gang activity" unless people were caught "in the act" of committing a specific crime.

Another interesting finding was that if an association was dissatisfied with CPO responsiveness, the importance of other trail-related issues were amplified due to their frustration relative to loitering or other issues. For example, one of the two neighborhoods frustrated about responsiveness was also frustrated about landscaping/lawn maintenance and contacted County code enforcement as well as the local newspaper seeking satisfaction. They said that "baby-sitting" the Pinellas Trail should be the County's responsibility, not the adjacent property owners'.

The survey instrument also included a question designed to determine which groups of residents were most affected by specific trail-related concerns. In other words, does privacy and noise only affect trail-abutting properties? Since the highest rated trail concerns were crime, loitering and landscaping, most respondents felt that these issues impacted many or all neighborhood residents.

When the HOA Officers ranked the importance of trail-related concerns, crime, loitering, and landscaping were ranked most important. Interestingly, when asked how the Pinellas Trail could best be improved, the two neighborhoods that were most agitated by crime/loitering only suggested that maintenance and landscaping be improved and made no comments related to crime. Accordingly, it seems that they are most disconcerted by perceived inequities and disparities in the Pinellas Trail quality between communities.

Seven of eight HOA Officers said that they used the Pinellas Trail for recreation and exercise more often than commuting, shopping, and visiting friends. This pattern of used is

echoed in the residents' survey. Several respondents offered recommendations to encourage commuting on the trail, including sufficient lighting, consistent amenities, overpasses for congested intersections, more informational signs and consistent mileage markers and distance to selected locations signs.

Four respondents stated that they felt that the Pinellas Trail had increased property values somewhat. Two respondents were unsure of the trail's impact on neighborhood property values and the other two asserted that the trail had had no impact on property values. Notably, no respondent stated that property values had declined even though there were two potential answers in that direction. These responses are consistent with the residents' survey and actual sales data.

The survey instrument also included an open-ended question about how the Pinellas Trail could be improved. The most unique suggestion was that long-range surveillance cameras be installed and monitored remotely by volunteers. Several people suggested that the cameras be installed on light stanchions that are needed to adequately light the trail and that motorcycle police could respond to any incidences along the trail.

Several respondents suggested that the trail should include more pedestrian and cyclist amenities including water fountains, wastebaskets and shaded benches whereas another respondent was concerned that such amenities would create opportunities for loitering or otherwise encourage it.

One respondent suggested that any access to alleys be eliminated and that entry points to the trail be restricted to certain locations. Another suggested that dog-litter was a concern and that the trail needed more ground markings to separate cyclists and pedestrians. Both of these concerns were echoed in the residents' mail-back survey. It was also suggested that the trail include exercise stops (parcours) for sit-ups and the like. One representative said that the trail should have had more of an economic impact for adjacent businesses than it has to date. Another advised that bicycle bells would decrease bike accidents and asked that the trail be

better landscaped along Alternate US 19. A respondent of the residents' survey also suggested additional landscaping along Alternate US 19. Six of the respondents mentioned either landscape maintenance or lack of flourishing landscaping. As noted above, several pointed out wide disparities in the appearance of the Pinellas Trail.

#### E. Conclusions

The HOA telephone interviews were designed to identify how the Pinellas Trail affects neighborhood quality, property values, and quality-of-life. The interview also sought to identify what actions, if any, the HOAs had taken to address specific issues. Eighty-seven percent of HOA officers said that they used the Pinellas Trail for recreation and exercise more often than for commuting, shopping, and visiting friends. This pattern of use is echoed in the residents' survey with the trail being used less frequently for non-recreational or utilitarian trips. Fifty percent of the HOA respondents said that the Pinellas Trail had increased property values "somewhat" while 25 percent were "unsure" and the remainder said that it had had "no impact" on property values. Notably, no respondent stated that property values had declined. These responses are consistent with the realtors' survey, residents' survey, and actual sales data.

Of particular significance are opinions regarding the disparity of trail amenities among communities. Emotions ran high concerning the existence of attractive landscaping, consistent provision of amenities, amount of buffering and the quality of landscape maintenance. This point was echoed in the recommended improvements comments while crime was not. More than a third of the officers said that their boards had not discussed the Pinellas Trail or trail concerns. They ranked crime, loitering, and landscaping most important among trail-related concerns. While police responsiveness was a stated concern, it appears that if a homeowner's association was primarily concerned about crime, then the police responded effectively when aided by a neighborhood watch. Accordingly, it seems that the HOAs are most disconcerted by crime and perceived inequities in trail quality between communities.