

10/29/25

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### RE: The Future HGPD Must Prioritize Transparency, Affordability, and Resilience

Dear Mayor Welch and Members of the St. Petersburg City Council,

On behalf of the Sierra Club Florida and our 2,584 dues-paying Suncoast Group members in Pinellas County, we urge you to pull the City's 30-day Request for Proposals (RFP) process for the Gas Plant District, and instead initiate a deliberate, community-informed planning effort before any additional proposals are solicited, land is sold, or leases are signed.

The real issue is the sequence and the lack of community-driven input that should be a given per the City's [Community Benefit Agreements](#) and its [existing sustainability](#) (ISAP) and [resilience plans](#) (SPAR).

This is not about delaying progress—it's about defining how success will be measured as the community collectively envisions the future of the Historic Gas Plant District. **We offer the following rationale as we implore you to pump the brakes on this once-in-a-generation opportunity:**

#### Lead with Vision, Not Reaction

The Gas Plant site, 86 acres of publicly-owned land in the heart of Saint Petersburg, is one of the most valuable and consequential redevelopment opportunities in the country, yet it appears that the City is jumping in reaction to unsolicited offers rather than leading a deliberate process with a clear vision. The community engagement and visioning you sought prior to the abandoned Hines agreement are still relevant. Will those community-identified priorities be incorporated into all RFP documents? What metrics will be used to evaluate delivery? Have applicants been informed of the community planning process or engaged in dialogue with local residents and leaders?

Before entertaining new proposals, the City must first define the **guiding principles** that will shape this process. This means identifying and codifying the priorities that matter most to residents:

- **Affordable and mixed-income housing** that serves those most in need (below 80% AMI), creates pathways to generational wealth, and proactively addresses rising energy burdens by ensuring long-term affordability, energy efficiency, and resilience amid looming utility rate increases;
- **Living-wage jobs and workforce development** to ensure long-term prosperity for residents;
- **Youth opportunity and cultural restoration**, particularly for descendants of those displaced from the original Gas Plant neighborhood;
- **Environmental resilience and climate preparedness**, including resilient energy, stormwater management, and open and green spaces for ecological and community health;
- **Public benefit and fiscal accountability** to ensure taxpayers are not underwriting and subsidizing private profits.

These principles should drive not only the content of the next RFP but also the evaluation criteria, budget allocations, and future negotiations. The planning must be **community vision-driven**, not developer-driven.

### **A Community-Informed Planning Framework**

Community-informed planning is not a box to check — it is the foundation of trust. When the City removed the original Gas Plant community through eminent domain, it made explicit promises of return and prosperity that were never fulfilled. That history must guide us today.

Furthermore, as was noted in an article in [St Pete Rising](#), “Under Florida law, if a local government receives an unsolicited proposal and wishes to explore it further, it must first open the process to competition by publishing a public notice and allowing other parties the opportunity to submit proposals for the lease, purchase, or development of all or part of the property”. ([Florida Statutes Section 255.065](#))

**We propose that before issuing any new RFP, the City should:**

1. **Establish a clear planning framework** rooted in measurable outcomes aligned with adopted plans such as the [Integrated Sustainability Action Plan](#) (ISAP), the [St. Pete Agile Resilience Plan](#) (SPAR), and the [Sustainability & Resiliency of City Facilities Ordinance No. 359-H](#) (Sustainable Building Design).
2. **Launch a public visioning process**, open to residents, business owners, neighborhood associations, and descendants of the displaced community, to define the collective goals for housing, jobs, green spaces, cultural identity, and more.
3. **Empower independent advisory bodies**, including but not limited to, the Community Benefits Agreement Advisory Committee, to support this process with credible, nonpartisan input, ensuring that all stakeholders are represented and that no participant holds personal or financial interest in the redevelopment outcomes.

4. **Embed environmental and social equity standards** into all contracts, so that clean energy integration, microgrids, flood resilience, native green infrastructure, green spaces, public parks, and the restoration of Booker Creek are not optional features, but indeed core requirements.
5. **Build transparency mechanisms** into public dashboards, open workshops, and published cost-benefit analyses so residents can see exactly how each proposal aligns with shared goals and public values.

### **A Call for Leadership**

Mayor Welch and Council, your leadership has the power to redefine what equitable, sustainable urban redevelopment looks like in America. This redevelopment is not merely a real estate transaction; it is an act of restorative justice and generational investment. The Gas Plant District carries a moral weight — one that demands principled stewardship over speed.

To move forward without a coherent community-driven plan risks repeating the same mistakes that displaced a thriving community decades ago. A rushed 30-day RFP invites hasty, poorly-defined proposals that may undermine the City's long-term fiscal, social, and environmental health.

You are responsible for ensuring a **transparent, inclusive, and accountable process** is followed that honors both the past and the future. Saint Petersburg can demonstrate national leadership by showing that planning and participation, not expediency, define good governance.

Sierra Club stands ready to support you.

Sincerely,

#### **Suncoast Sierra Club Executive Committee:**

Sasha Bartunek, Bryan Beckman, Megan Colby, Pat Gerard, Erica Hall, Jamie McWade, Olivia Mustain, James Scott, Glenna Wentworth; and

Pat Fling, Co-Chair of Suncoast Sierra Club Political Committee; and

Michael McGrath, Lead Organizer, Sierra Club Florida Chapter

CC:

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**Addendum:**

Stakeholder letter | [Suncoast Sierra Club Letter to the CBA](#) (2/1/24)

Factsheet | [Sierra Club Rays Deal & HGPS Factsheet](#) (April 2024)

Stakeholder letter | [Improving the proposed agreements for the Historic Gas Plant Redevelopment and Rays/Hines Stadium Deal](#) (5/3/24)

Tampa Bay Times | Opinion | [We St. Pete environmentalists have these questions about the Rays stadium-Gas Plant deal](#) (5/7/24)

Stakeholder letter | [Community leaders call upon you to “pump the brakes” on the Historic Gas Plant Redevelopment and Rays/Hines Stadium deal](#) (6/13/24)

Stakeholder letter | [Improving the revised agreements for the Historic Gas Plant Redevelopment and Rays/Hines Stadium Deal](#) (7/12/24)

Factsheet | [Hines Comparables Factsheet](#) (7/12/24)

Tampa Bay Times | Opinion | [Here’s how the Sierra Club would fix the Rays-Hines deal](#) (7/15/25)

Stakeholder letter | [To our dismay, the deal is done without being fully fixed. Now what?](#) (7/18/24)