The Intracoastal Waterway Plan for Palm Beach County grew out of months of due diligence review by the project steering committee, which led to a seven-day public planning charrette conducted in May 2008. More than 150 participants from all walks of life were engaged in a full-day public input session, followed by a week-long studio on-site. Additional public input was gathered during the studio, which was open to the public daily from 9 AM until 9 PM. The multidisciplinary charrette team was comprised of architects, engineers, planners, economists, designers, and others, who combined efforts to develop the vision, strategies, and recommendations contained in the Plan.

At the conclusion of the week, a presentation of “work in progress” was conducted, with residents, property and business owners, elected officials, agency and local government staff, and others in attendance. Public input continued throughout the development of the Plan.
The Initiation of the Plan Concept

The idea of an Intracoastal Waterway Plan for Palm Beach County emerged through the development of Palm Beach County’s 21st Century Strategic Economic Development Plan, which was adopted in March 2007. The Strategic Economic Development Plan is the guiding document by which the County hopes to achieve a number of significant objectives, such as effectively reinforcing its tax base, generating revenues with minimal increase in public services, building a global entrepreneurial climate, enhancing and accenting the natural and built environment, highlighting arts and culture, and generating smart transportation and land uses. The Intracoastal Waterway Plan is a signature project within the Quality of Place strategic direction of the County’s Plan. The Quality of Place strategic direction seeks to leverage the quality of the County’s arts and cultural cluster as a strategic asset to support economic growth and provide a competitive advantage. The following quote is taken from Palm Beach County’s Plan.

Palm Beach County has an opportunity to capitalize on its 43-mile stretch of the Intracoastal Waterway by creating a regional economic strategy that builds on its unique environmental assets. Examples abound throughout the world where cities have capitalized on environmental and cultural assets to drive their regional economies. They have done so by linking cultural facilities such as botanical gardens, museums, and zoos to easy and friendly transportation modalities that include trails, ferries, and water taxis. Such a system is feasible for PBC’s downtown venues along the Intracoastal Waterway. In addition, PBC’s working waterfront has created strong value adjacent to the Port of Palm Beach through proposals such as the construction of mega yacht slips, racing sloop repair facilities, marina docks, day trip gambling, the Lockheed Undersea Research plant, and environmental attractions such as Peanut Island.

Towards the goal of an Intracoastal Waterway Plan, the Palm Beach MPO initiated a public planning process that began in 2007. The Palm Beach MPO is responsible for integrating all modes of transportation planning and programming, including water-based transportation as well as economics, environmental sustainability, and quality of life enhancement.

The navigational, operational, environmental, and planning characteristics of the Intracoastal Waterway are also directly overseen by the Florida Inland Navigational District (FIND), a special taxing district responsible for the continued management and maintenance of the waterway in Florida. Thus, the Palm Beach MPO and FIND partnered to enable this planning effort. The TCRPC was requested to organize and facilitate the process, which began with the formation of a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency steering committee, including the following:

**PLANNING FACTORS:**

1. Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
2. Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
3. Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
4. Enhance the accessibility and mobility options available to people and for freight;
5. Protect and enhance the environment, enhance energy conservation, and improve quality of life;
6. Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, access to and between modes, for people and freight;
7. Promote efficient system management and operations;
8. Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system.

Derived from the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the MPO operates with a broad set of planning factors as noted above from the agency’s website.

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The steering committee conducted extensive due diligence to better understand the range of issues relevant to the Intracoastal. Local governments, redevelopment authorities, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations educated the steering committee regarding various projects and programs related to the waterway. The committee also reviewed waterway plans from other parts of the nation and world. Through this background review, the steering committee determined the key areas for which additional technical insight would be necessary for plan development. The steering committee also acknowledged the broad approach that would be necessary for the plan to be successful, expanding the scope to cover economics, transportation, and land use as well as natural systems, eco-tourism, recreation, and public access. Ultimately, the committee recommended a planning charrette be conducted to gain public input and enable a multi-disciplinary process to develop the Intracoastal Waterway Plan.

The Process

The Intracoastal Waterway Plan for Palm Beach County grew out of months of due diligence, background review, and ultimately, a public, seven-day planning charrette held from May 9 – 15, 2008. This Waterway Plan represents the citizens’ vision and goals for the future of the Intracoastal, both with regards to activities on the waterway as well as those occurring on its upland. The charrette was held at Palm Beach Atlantic University in West Palm Beach and was well attended by a diverse cross-section of the community including residents, property owners, local business representatives, local governments, agencies, and various organizations. The charrette focused on the Intracoastal Waterway as well as the areas (both in-water and upland) located within a half-mile east and west of the channel centerline. Key issues addressed included public access, natural systems, transportation, land use, recreation and eco-tourism, and the economics of the waterway.

The project team for the development of the ICW Plan included the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (TCRPC) staff (Michael Busha, Marlene Brunot, Zachary Davis, Kim DeLaHey, Wynsum Hatton, Michelle Hipps, Dana Littie, Peter Merritt, and Greg Vaday) and a team of professionals that included Cambridge Systematics (Michael Williamson), Economic Research Associates (Tom Lavash and Alyssa Cohen), the Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions at Florida Atlantic University (Jim Murley), and urban designers Marcela Camblor, Daniel M. Cary, Steven Fett, and Jose Venegas.
Formation of the Plan

The team assisted the citizens in studying the many challenges faced by the community and proposed specific solutions. The design team also relied heavily on input from various public agencies, including the Palm Beach MPO, Palm Beach County (particularly the Office of Economic Development and Departments of Environmental Resource Management and Parks and Recreation), local governments, and others.

During the week of the charrette, the design team arranged an open working studio at Palm Beach Atlantic University where the doors remained open to the public all week. Residents, business owners, agency representatives, and others regularly visited the studio and made useful comments and suggestions regarding the work in progress.

At the end of the charrette week, a presentation of Work-in-Progress was held on Thursday, May 15, 2008. Residents, property and business owners, local government and agency staff, and elected officials were present. Since that presentation, work has continued following the initial public workshop. A series of final presentations by TCRPC staff were held during 2009 where additional agency, citizen, and professional input was gathered for the completion of the Intracoastal Waterway Plan.

The Study Area: Existing Conditions

The Intracoastal Waterway in Palm Beach County travels a nearly 43-mile north/south corridor through the eastern edge of the County. Initially developed by interconnecting natural lakes and lagoons, today’s waterway is physically separated from the Atlantic Ocean by a series of barrier islands, with the

During the public input session, participants were provided background information about the waterway’s formation, conditions, and on-going plans and projects.

The primary public input session for the ICW Plan was held on May 8, 2008 at Palm Beach Atlantic College.
interruption of four inlets cut through the land barrier that create saltwater feeds. To the west, the waterway is bound by uplands with the interruption of man-made canals designed for flood control, which introduce freshwater to the waterway. The Lake Worth Lagoon, Indian River Lagoon, and Loxahatchee River encompass the Intracoastal channel within their natural systems. The uplands on both sides of the Intracoastal include a wide range of land uses, from preservation areas, parks, and recreational facilities to residential neighborhoods and mixed-use downtowns to marine industrial uses and the Port of Palm Beach. To enable a comprehensive analysis of the Intracoastal Waterway, the steering committee recommended a study area which extended east and west a half-mile from the centerline of the Intracoastal. A map of this area is included in this chapter.

The eastern portion of Palm Beach County contains its highest population densities and commercial intensity. Accordingly, the roughly 43 square mile study area (less than 2% of the County’s land area) includes approximately 110,000 residents, or just below 10%. Of the 23 municipalities that abut the Intracoastal, seven maintain well-developed mixed-use downtowns that embrace the waterway, and the Port of Palm Beach is located directly on the water. The majority of private lands consist of mostly higher-valued residential development followed by

More than 120 participants attended the primary public session, with dozens more visiting the studio to provide additional public input during the week.
The ICW Study Area highlighted in yellow and green. The northern and southern ends of the study area are denoted by the orange lines.
commercial use, and a variety of public uses (e.g., conservation, recreation, open space).

Land values along the Intracoastal have continued to escalate over time, with continued pressure for mostly residential development until the market’s recent downturn. Rising land values combined with escalating property taxes have caused considerable conversion of commercial and industrial properties to residential, causing a loss of working water-fronts in Palm Beach County and throughout the state. Two factors provide a respite from these historic pressures, including the current real estate market and Florida’s recent adoption of Amendment 2 to provide property tax relief for marine industrial uses or “working water-fronts.” While Palm Beach County has adopted policies to discourage additional conversion of marine industrial lands via “no net loss” provisions, there remain 23 municipal governments with individual land use control over these waterfront properties.

Participants’ Requests

From May 9th through May 15th, the public, municipalities, and public agencies participated in a seven-day charrette process. The initial
public workshop and subsequent design sessions attracted more than 150 people. Participants discussed their ideas at tables facilitated by charrette team members and literally drew suggestions on study area maps at each table. At the end of the drawing session, a representative from each table presented their table’s ideas. A sample listing of the main ideas generated in the public session includes the following:

- increase public access to the water via parks, bridges, and river walks
- restore spoil islands and habitat areas and allow camping and public access
- construct more public fishing piers and river walks
- explore water taxi programs to interconnect marine destinations
- clean and enhance canals, especially the C-51 Canal
- add more canoe/kayak launch sites in ICW and portages in canal spillways
- connect natural areas to each other
- improve upland and water transit access waterway and marine destinations
- create a county-wide water taxi system with different kinds of taxi stops
- make boat ramps more efficient with staging docks and day docks
- expand waterway destinations, e.g., day docks,
spoil islands, restaurants
• remove derelict boats and clean waterway and explore mooring fields
• support marine industries with incentives and dredging (“Megayacht Mile”)
• utilize bridge replacement to increase public access and fishing opportunities
• maintain clear views to the water
• encourage use of green buildings, sustainable development practices, and renewable resources
• expand educational programs about natural resources, history, and hydrology
• support marina villages and other marine destinations (e.g., Jupiter’s Riverwalk, proposed Lake Worth marina village)
• promote rebuilding of natural shoreline or plantings along existing sea walls

After the initial public workshop, the charrette team investigated and tested ideas. The public visited the studio and offered additional input. The Work-in-Progress Presentation was held May 15 at Palm Beach Atlantic University where the team gathered more input. This Intracoastal Waterway Plan represents the collection, evaluation, and recommendations related to the ideas set forth during this process and the presentations that followed in 2009. The A series of presentations will be conducted by TCRPC in 2009 to gather additional input and further refine the recommendations of this plan. Ultimately, the plan will be completed for adoption in 2009. Accordingly, this ICW represents the participants’ vision for the Intracoastal Waterway.
Charrette participants' drawings from the Friday public session.
Charrette participants’ drawings from the Friday public session

Charrette participants working on their drawings.
Formation of the Plan

Regulatory Framework and Overview

Development adjacent to the Waterway is subject to a broad range of plans and regulations originating at all levels of government. In the United States, unlike many countries that have parliamentary forms of government, our federal system of government allows for overlapping regulations by different levels of government. In the development of this plan, a regulatory review was conducted of the nearly forty regulatory, planning, and technical documents related to the ICW in Palm Beach County as well as the 23 local government comprehensive plans. A matrix listing these planning, regulatory, and other documents is included in the Appendix.

The regulatory framework requires that individual projects be reviewed independently for project-related impacts, and in some cases, how the project impacts will cumulatively impact protected resources. Experience in other areas indicates that an overall plan for the entire Intracoastal Waterway in Palm Beach County may expedite the review and approval of individual projects by demonstrating cumulative impacts and also providing for coordinated mitigation of project level impacts.

New development or redevelopment adjacent to the Waterway must demonstrate plan consistency and regulatory compliance with each relevant, binding authority at all levels of government. While arguably duplicative and inefficient, this intergovernmental review is inherent in our form of government that relies on federalism and home rule. This entire process can be further complicated by the intervention of third-party entities who disagree with the final agency decisions and have legal standing to bring administrative and judicial review of those decisions. These reviews can lead to delay and extra expense to proposed development projects adjacent to the Waterway.

The development of this conceptual plan considers the various planning, regulatory, and programmatic plans of the various agencies that govern or otherwise regulate development on and along the ICW in Palm Beach County. For the individual projects identified in this ICW Plan, references have been noted where applicable regarding regulatory implications for their implementation. As noted in Chapter 10: Implementation, this plan recommends creation of a Palm Beach County Intracoastal Waterway Commission to assist and oversee implementation of the plan, including management and marketing of the Waterway as well as advocacy of the plan. This entity would also be envisioned to shepherd multi-jurisdictional projects through the various regulatory processes, with the comprehensive and broad vision detailed in this ICW report.
Review of Comparable Waterway Plans

As part of the due diligence leading to the charrette, a review of waterway plans from around the United States and internationally was conducted to identify programs and practices of relevance. Across the globe and throughout the United States, governmental and private entities are collaborating to restore existing development and facilitate new development adjacent to navigable waterways, both natural and man-made. A summary matrix listing the various plans is included in the Appendix.

In Europe and Great Britain, historic shipping canals have been rejuvenated by these new partnerships. The River Thames Waterway Plan 2006-2011 provides a good example of an historic waterway that is maintained by commercial shipping and provides amenities and access to billion dollar new developments along its reach. Typical of advanced efforts to undertake multiple purpose activities, the Thames Plan puts a premium on sustainability of its waterway, such that it is usable, accessible, and productive for future generations. The Thames Plan anticipates increased population along the waterway and focuses on improving the environmental quality of the waterway as new development and new infrastructure comes on line.

The British waterway initiatives are linked to their neighbors in the European Union (EU) through programs such as the Canal-Link Project in The North Sea. This effort pays special attention to the connections between the different waterways adjacent to the North Sea, seeking ways to create economic opportunities for tourism and recreation. In Europe, the EU has issued a comprehensive development plan for its member nations by setting positive incentives and breaking barriers in an effort to develop the inland waterways by linking them to land-based intermodal systems. These linkages are aimed at relieving traffic congestion and mastering energy use for sustainable development options. In the United States, there is growing interest in returning to the full, comprehensive use of our historic waterways to enhance our economies and individual communities. The Eire Canal National Heritage Corridor builds on enhancing the historic heritage of the historic communities that grew up along the canal. The Trinity River Corridor Project strives to connect the metropolitan Dallas by making the Trinity River part of the “front yard” of the communities adjacent to the river. River redevelopment plans have been prepared for the New River in Fort Lauderdale and the Miami River in Miami as well. Lessons learned from these international and national efforts can be summarized as follows:

- The plans strive to be sustainable over a long planning period (up to 50 years).
- The plans draw on the existing cultural and historic values inherent to the waterways.
- The plans view waterways as a mode of transportation serving adjacent developed areas.
- The plans maintain and enhance important environmental values existing within the waterways.
- The plans are important parts of integrated, economic development strategies that rely on government and private entities to closely collaborate towards agreed upon goals.

These broad themes were acknowledged as applicable in the development of this ICW report.