

The Evolution of Economic Equity Strategies by St. Petersburg Mayors (1991 to 2021)

A Brief Summary & Timeline

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JANUARY 7, 2022 **REVIEW COPY**



Introduction

The City of St. Petersburg entered a new era of governance in November 2021, when voters elected Kenneth T. Welch as the city's first African American mayor. Welch is also the first to stake a "day one" commitment to **equitable development and business opportunities**.

The following pages summarize the evolution of the **economic equity strategies** deployed by the four mayors elected since St. Petersburg transitioned to the strong mayor form of government in the early 1990s. Each of the four men broke new ground in moving St. Pete toward equitable economic growth.

PLEASE NOTE: This draft is being shared with former and current officials and stakeholders for fact-checking and consensus around events that are subject to interpretation (e.g., ascribing an achievement that involved actions by multiple mayors). This summary content was compiled during the 10-month structural racism study commissioned by the City of St. Petersburg in 2021; it therefore does not capture the full breadth of work carried out over the 20-year span of leadership of the mayors featured herein. With suggestions and questions: gypsy@onecommunitystpete.com.

Mayor David Fischer (1991-2001)



Former Mayor
David Fischer
(left), in 2016

Photo: Tampa Bay
Times

St. Petersburg officials began coalescing around economic development plans and investments in white areas of the city as far back as 1902. It was nearly a century later when the City ventured its first large-scale development plan for historically Black areas - the Challenge Plan - in 1997.

The initiative was created in response to race riots in 1996, sparked by the police killing of Tyron Lewis (a young Black man) and fueled by long-seething grievances among African Americans over officials' neglect of commercial and housing development in the city's formerly segregated Black neighborhoods.

A couple of small area plans pre-dated Fischer's Challenger Plan, such as the 1978 Module 16 Plan and the ill-fated 1979 Gas Plant Redevelopment Plan. But the focus of the former was primarily public structures (e.g., building the Enoch Davis Community Center), while the latter was ultimately shelved.

Though the Challenge Plan was widely criticized for underperforming relative to its ambitious goals, it was the first City-backed initiative with an expressed purpose of development in Black areas of the city.

Mayor David Fischer's administration began funneling investments to the "Challenge Area" (5.5 square miles encompassing the area now known as "Midtown") toward four goals: **Economic Equity**, to reduce unemployment by

adding 2,500 jobs by 2001; **Education**, to increase reading levels and decrease dropout rates; **Community Renewal**, to increase area property values by 5% yearly; and **Public Safety**, to reduce crime by 5% per year and improve police-community relations.

Much like St. Petersburg's Black slum clearance projects in the 1950s, the Challenge Plan focused on removing blight, e.g., from 1998 to 2001 the city decreased the number of vacant and boarded properties in the area by 58%.

But unlike the urban renewal efforts of the 1950s, the Challenge Plan (and aligned initiatives) resulted in millions invested to build, rehabilitate, and renovate commercial and residential structures and infrastructure.

The Challenge Plan was by no means as sweeping or coherent as the early 20th century "City Beautiful" investments crafted to develop segregated white areas. But it was a start. Between 1997 and 2001, public funding to spatial development in the Challenge Area topped \$176 million (in 2021 values).

Though huge compared to the historical record, the Challenge Plan and its successors such as the Midtown Strategic Plan, were seen by some as "too little too late." By 1997, only one-third of the city's African American population lived in the Challenge Area, and City investments there paled in comparison to the aggregated effect of decades of public neglect.

Mayor Rick Baker (2001 to 2010)



Former Mayor Baker (4th from right) with Deputy Mayor Goliath Davis (3rd from right) at a ground-breaking ceremony. Former Councilmembers Rene Flowers and Rick Kriseman are seen two from the left and right of Baker. Flowers now serves as a Pinellas County Commissioner. Kriseman was elected Mayor of St. Petersburg in 2013. (Occasion/data not yet identified)

Mayor Rick Baker ably took the baton from Fischer, whose administration set in motion the creation of the Midtown Strategic Plan. It released in 2002 and became a bible of sorts to Baker and his historic appointee, Dr. Goliath Davis, as the city's first Black Deputy Mayor.

The two men were a driving force in a sweeping program of new investments in the 5.5 square mile Midtown area. One of five cornerstones of Baker's administration was "encouraging economic development, particularly in the "urban core," which Baker saw as encompassing both Downtown and Midtown.

He became the first Mayor of St. Petersburg to stake a "day one" focus on development in the heart of the city's Black community, which he termed "the city's area in the most need of economic development."

Baker institutionalized "**redevelopment**" as an overriding strategy for Midtown's revitalization. His 8+ years in office saw over 400,000 square feet of construction and renovation of commercial and institutional spaces in Black neighborhoods, and rehab, construction, and demolition of hundreds of housing units.

Revitalization of the historic 22nd Street South (aka the Deuces) was a focal point for Baker. He and his predecessor, Mayor Fischer, seeded and supported a dozen sizable projects along the corridor, including the St. Petersburg College Achievement Center (2003), renovation of the Royal Theater (2004), preservation and

expansion of Mercy Hospital and Johnnie Ruth Clarke Health Center (2004), construction of the 47,000 square foot Tangerine Plaza (2005), a new post office (2005), development of the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum (2006), and construction of a GTE Credit Union branch (2009).

Baker was equally aggressive in the educational arena. He recruited corporate partners for each of the city's 44 public schools; raised funds for 1,000 college scholarships for at-risk middle school students; and created a policy that allowed City staff to mentor on paid work time. Through his "Top Apple" program, St. Petersburg became the only city in Florida to offer cash bonuses to principals of A-graded or improving schools.

Some in the community took exception to the "strongman" style of Baker and his Deputy Mayor. Many felt it perpetuated the outdated "gatekeeper" approach to "managing" the Black community. A separate criticism was that Baker ignored the Childs Park neighborhood (home to a larger concentration of poverty than Midtown), which did not undergo development planning by the City until 2007.

Nevertheless, Baker achieved many firsts for the city's African American community. His was the first administration to institutionalize a service and development framework for Midtown, and later Childs Park. He was also the first Mayor to embrace the goal of closing the Black-white education gap. He is reported to have initiated

a funded partnership with Pinellas Education Foundation and Pinellas County Schools that endures (though modified) to present day.

Hindsight created another critique of the Baker era: that his relentless focus on brick and mortar development left the economic standing of

African Americans unchanged. The Black poverty rate rose under Baker (even before the on-set of the Great Recession in late 2007), while employment was stagnant, and incarceration rates for Black men and boys climbed unabated during his tenure.

Mayor Bill Foster (2010 to 2014)



Former Mayor Bill Foster (left) meeting with 2020 Plan advocates (then known as Agenda 2010) about the possibility of creating a CRA in South St. Petersburg, in 2013. To Foster's right are historian Gwen Reese and Pastor Manuel Sykes.

Mayor Bill Foster presided over several important milestones. In his approach to economic growth for the African American community, he declared early on that he would continue the trajectory of Baker's two terms. He would not create a new plan but would drastically alter the City's model for community advancement.

Foster dismantled the Midtown Development division created by Baker, dissolved the post of Deputy Mayor for Midtown, and later, in 2011, fired Dr. Goliath Davis, whom Foster had demoted to Senior Administrator for Community Enrichment.

Development milestones under Foster's watch include the start of construction of the 45,000 square foot St. Petersburg College Midtown facility (finished during Mayor Rick Kriseman's first term); the completion and opening of the Manhattan Casino in 2013 (a project begun under Baker); and completion of the \$44 million Pinellas County Job Corps campus (started under Baker, with site assembly dating back to the end of the Fischer administration).

In response to advocacy by the Agenda 2010 group, Foster committed on the campaign trail

in 2009 that he would initiate creation of what became the South St. Petersburg Community Redevelopment Area (CRA).

He ultimately did start the process in early 2013, but was no longer in office when the Pinellas County Commission and St. Petersburg City Council voted to make the CRA official in 2015. This was thanks in large part to the leadership of future Mayor Ken Welch during his service on the Pinellas County Commission, and term limited former City Councilman Karl Nurse, who led the charge on the city level.

The CRA was an historic milestone several times over. It was the first of the 20+ CRAs in Pinellas to be located in a low-income majority-minority area. It was also one of the largest in Florida, and one of the few empowered to invest in non-real estate activities (including workforce and small business development).

Beyond brick and mortar, Foster supported the founding of the African American Heritage Trail, which - years hence - has blossomed into a cultural institution that attracts visitors from near and far.

Mayor Rick Kriseman (2014 to 2021)

Mayor Rick Kriseman and his Deputy Mayor Dr. Kanika Tomalin engineered a wholesale change in the city's approach to economic development for historically Black areas of the city. The newly-elected Mayor announced in 2013, that he would prioritize "people" over "places," with new investments in opportunity pathway programs to help more people and families to grow their earnings and assets.

The position was in response to community advocacy. Leaders of The 2020 Plan made the case that despite 20 years of concerted efforts in Midtown, traditional redevelopment approaches had not grown employment, income, or wealth for St. Petersburg's African American community.

Kriseman's earliest actions were to adopt The 2020 Plan for poverty reduction as one of five priorities for his first term, and to expand the on-the-drawing board CRA to 7.4 square miles (from the roughly 1.6 miles proposed by Foster). The expansion would translate to tens of millions of dollars more in tax financing that would be invested over the 30-year life of the CRA.

Over his eight years in office, Kriseman's team anchored investments of over \$20 million into opportunity programs, seeding programs that helped 4,000 people to train for and connect to new career and business opportunities.

Among the City's largest commitments were the \$3 million Cohort of Champions program that has so far supported 1,000 teens and parents with personal, career, and academic programs; the \$4 million St. Pete Works! collaboration that has helped 500 workers to upskill for higher-paying jobs; and investments in business growth and capital access that collectively worked with 840 entrepreneurs and leveraged over \$8 million to fund new programs.

The focus bore fruit. The latest Census data show record-setting gains for the city's Black community, in career education, employment, earnings and entrepreneurship. As examples, from 2014 to 2019, African Americans in St. Pete reduced their poverty rate and grew their earnings twice as fast as their peers across Florida and the nation.



Kriseman also pioneered first-time investments in equity plans, including the citywide Grow Smarter Alliance to "narrow race-based and place-based economic gaps in St. Pete" (housed at the St. Petersburg Chamber); and the One Community Plan, the city's first comprehensive economic growth plan for African Americans.

On the policy front, Kriseman championed new strategies that will measurably grow equity investments for years to come. In July 2021, St. Pete became the first city in Florida to adopt a standing citywide Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) policy. The policy requires "benefit" investments for covered development projects, and because it applies to the 86-acre Tropicana Field project, is expected to translate to hundreds of millions of dollars in new revenue to St. Petersburg's Black workforce and business community over the next decade.

Kriseman also set in motion events that may soon lead to a revival of the City's Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) Program, which was shuttered in 1999. In 2018, the City commissioned a Disparity Study to determine whether disparities exist between the availability of MBE suppliers and the extent of City purchasing from them. The study - concluded in 2021 - found gaping disparities in City contracting with Black-owned firms, thus providing a legal basis for creating race-conscious procurement policies and goals in future).

The most persistent criticism of the outgoing mayor is that Kriseman struggled for traction in the development arena. His team oversaw two false starts on the 14-acre Commerce Park

project; two short-lived operator agreements at the Manhattan Casino; and repeated delays on the 3.7-acre Tangerine Plaza project.

Yet the administration orchestrated several innovations in the space, including a \$25 million commitment to the Deuces Rising plan for the continued revitalization of the historic 22nd Street South Corridor (a.k.a., the Deuces), and the 21-point equitable development framework for the Tropicana Field redevelopment project.

A ninth inning victory for the Kriseman team was City Council's October 2021 approval of Sankofa on the Deuces & Deuces Rising, a 3-part partnership that will bring new commercial and housing development to the Deuces, while

establishing a Development Fund that will help accelerate real estate projects along the Deuces and other major community corridors.

In early December 2021, Kriseman's legacy - viz Black community advancement - was sealed with the completion of a structural racism study by University of South Florida and community researchers. The study documented decades of openly racist and disparate investments in white versus Black areas and residents of the city.

In his final month in office, City Council approved (5 to 3) a resolution to begin reparative actions to address the racial gaps created and perpetuated as a result of governmental policies.

Mayor Ken Welch (2021-TBD)

Newly-elected Mayor Ken Welch will be the first chief executive in city history with the lived experience of being an African American. This, combined with his 20 years of elected leadership and track record of innovation in the equity space are sure to have vast implications for the city's approach to economic growth for African Americans.



Welch has been a party to many of the economic equity innovations charted in recent years, on both the county and city levels.

In his service as a Pinellas County Commissioner, he helped engineer the creation of the South St. Petersburg CRA which has so far committed \$18 million* in funding to workforce, business and housing development within the 7.4 square mile territory.

Welch was an original member of the 2020 Plan Taskforce (now known as One Community), which is credited with spearheading tidal changes in strategies for economic equity.

During his tenure as County Commission Chair, Welch was the lead sponsor of the Commission's 2018 and 2019 actions to overhaul the County Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Program. It has since multiplied County purchasing from small businesses (local, minority, and veteran owned), from \$230,000 in 2018 to \$26 million in 2021. The program has also tripled the number of

minority-owned firms earning County contracts.

Perhaps most prescient for future equity practice, Welch is a descendant of the Gas Plant neighborhood (present day home of Tropicana Field) which stands to become the most consequential equity investment the City of St. Petersburg has ever undertaken.

Mayor Welch committed on the campaign trail that he would tackle St. Pete's affordable housing shortage head on. He named several of his priorities for equitable growth during his Community Conversation series in December. Among them: enhancements to CRA investment strategies and the new Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) policy he championed last spring; as well as nurturing synergistic growth in innovation sectors, while strengthening the arts community as a key driver of the city economy.

*See next page for a summary timeline of St. Pete's evolving equity strategies. *Confirming.*

Evolution of City of St. Petersburg Economic Equity Strategies

| | Mayor David Fischer | Mayor Rick Baker | Mayor Bill Foster | Mayor Rick Kriseman |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Development Management Approach | Organized crisis response, following race riots of 1996; created Challenge 2001 Taskforce | Centralized model; created Midtown Dev. division under City's 1 st Black Deputy Mayor, Dr. Goliath Davis | Decentralized model; dismantled Midtown Development division | Distributed model; created Urban Affairs Division for cross-departmental coordination of initiatives |
| Economic Development Plans & Strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge Plan (1997) for impact in 4 areas: Economic Equity; Education; Community Renewal; and Public Safety • Supported Florida Main Street designations for 22nd Street S. and Grand Central (2001) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midtown Strategic Plan (2002) for impact in 8 areas: housing; Economic Dev.; Education; Administration; Land Use & Dev. Regulations; Faith Based & Community Orgs.; Public Safety; and Public Investment. • Created Childs Park Strategic Planning Initiative (2007) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to continue redevelopment strategy of the Baker administration (2010) • Initiated creation of South St. Pete CRA, originally drafted at approximately 1.6 square miles (2013) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Named 1st Black Deputy Mayor w/ city-wide purview, Dr. Kanika Tomalin, to lead new approach prioritizing people over place-making (2014) • Expanded South St. Pete CRA to 7.4 square miles (2014); CRA Plan (2015) • Funded City's 1st eco. growth plan for African Americans (One Community) + citywide equity alliance (Grow Smarter) • Deuces Rising Plan (2019), 8 acres & \$25M committed to 3 projects (2019) |
| Business Development Strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Created 1st City-funded capital access programs targeting African Americans (1997) ▪ Created City Business Assistance Center (1999) ▪ Created Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Procurement after MBE Program was dismantled by City Council vote (1999) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Targeted growth programs with legacy community businesses e.g., Weekly Challenger, Lorraine's Seafood, and Happy Workers' Children's Center ▪ Created 1st City partnership with Black developer (2003) to build the 47,000 sq. ft. Tangerine Plaza | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Created new Greenhouse partnership with St. Pete Chamber to manage the former Business Assistance Center (2013) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funded Disparity Study to establish legal basis to create MBE Program (2018) ▪ Funded creation of equity-focused entrepreneurial ecosystem with new business capital & growth svcs (2014) ▪ Funded \$3.5 M in business support programs targeting South St. Pete ▪ Spearheaded City's largest-ever contract with an MBE (est. \$16M) |
| Workforce Development Strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initiated multiple workforce training programs, e.g., Youth Build, STARS, Construction training ▪ Began successful series of City-organized Job Fairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initiated Summer Youth Intern Program (SYIP) partnership with BOLEY (2003) ▪ Continued/expanded YouthBuild Program | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supported creation of Bank On St. Pete to expand financial literacy among low-income workers (2012, led by Councilman Karl Nurse) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Funded 2020 Plan and 6 poverty-exit programs to bridge more workers to career trainings (2014) ▪ Funded St. Pete Works!, City's 1st workforce collaborative (2016) ▪ Overhauled/ expanded City youth employment programs (2015-2017) |
| Economic Equity Policies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shifted CDBG funding formula to invest more in Midtown with \$10.8M committed ▪ Helped create City's 1st collective impact initiative for Black asset growth, WIN Coalition to help families become homeowners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Institutionalized City partnership to support education and narrow the achievement gap, e.g., engaging private sector to raise 1,000 college scholarships for at-promise youth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None identified | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adopted citywide CBA policy (a Florida first) and Ban the Box policies; created equitable dev. framework for 86-acre Tropicana Field redevelopment project ▪ Created City's 1st career & personal dev. program for boys and men - My Brothers & Sisters Keepers/Cohort programs |
| Commercial Development Projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start of Dome Industrial Park Plan and Johnnie Ruth Clark Center ▪ Construction of Jordan Park Redevelopment Project; Perkins Elementary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Construction of Tangerine Plaza, GTE Credit Union, Post Office ▪ Renovation of Manhattan Casino, Royal Theater, Johnnie Ruth Clark Center), Jordan School ▪ Start of Pinellas County Job Corps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start of St. Petersburg College Midtown facility ▪ Renovation of Manhattan Casino | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Re-opening Manhattan Casino & opening St. Petersburg College Midtown ▪ Start of Tangerine Plaza reboot; Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum; Sankofa on the Deuces; Deuces Rising townhomes |