



ST. PETE PIER

ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES



Winner: 2022 ULI Global Award for Excellence in Urban Design

Connecting the central spine of St. Petersburg's downtown to the waterfront, the revitalized St. Pete Pier has become a landmark for community gathering and recreation along its pedestrian-only green spaces and quarter-mile-long promenade. With its extensive public art, striking architecture, and activated public spaces, St. Pete Pier—the largest waterfront park in the U.S. Southeast—offers locals and tourists alike an engaging park experience in a rapidly growing downtown.

Owner/developer: City of St. Petersburg

Designers: The Rogers Partners, ASD|SKY, Ken Smith Workshop, Janet Echelman, W Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Wannemacher Jensen Architects

Construction manager: Skanska USA

Size: 26 acres (10.5 ha)

Cover: With 26 acres of activated space, the Pier District has something for everyone, whether they are looking for lots of activity or a quiet place to meditate and relax. Amenities include a beach, several dining options, a market, a playground, a splash pad, and four public art installations. (Rich Montalbano)



The pier was integral to the St. Petersburg Downtown Waterfront Master Plan, with its vision “to protect, enhance, and promote St. Petersburg’s downtown waterfront as one of the premier waterfront destinations and attractions in the United States.” (City of St. Petersburg)

Park Overview

The St. Pete Pier is a 26-acre reimagined waterfront park in St. Petersburg, Florida, overlooking Tampa Bay. Averaging 80 events and 2.3 million visitors annually, the pier has a diverse set of amenities, including an interactive playground, a splash pad, retail concepts, an environmental education center, a market, event spaces, public art, green space, and an iconic 3,000-foot-long promenade.

Redevelopment was initiated in 2005 when the previous pier, built in 1926, fell into disrepair. Previous iterations were underused by city residents and served a limited purpose since they were not well connected to the rest of the city, making it an isolated destination along the water.

The new St. Pete Pier was designed as a part of the larger St. Petersburg Downtown Waterfront Master Plan to ensure strong connectivity with the rest of the city's waterfront park system, including continuous linkages and pathways, transit, and overall increased public access. After 15 years of intentional public outreach, planning, and construction, the park opened in July 2020, embodying the city's ethos to preserve the waterfront community asset and make it publicly accessible in perpetuity.

The park offers both passive and active recreation and event spaces to appeal to people of different ages, interests, and physical abilities. The central plaza has a café and multipurpose lawn punctuated by a 248-foot-long colorful aerial net sculpture by world-renowned artist

Janet Echelman. Emphasizing family-friendly entertainment, the lawn is connected to an interactive children's playground as well as a beach and splash pad to keep the space cool on hot days. The lawn is often activated by live music, games, yoga, and other activities that are hosted by an event company that the city contracts with. The third party is paid an annual fee to secure sponsorships and vendors for events hosted by the pier, which helps offset operational costs associated with the events.

Beyond the lawn, the city worked to redesign the adjoining street to improve pedestrian connectivity of the pier to downtown. Previously, Second Avenue North had consisted of a wide four-lane roadway with a landscaped median down the center and traffic signals at both ends. With the goal of pedestrian safety in mind, the infrastructure changes led to a reduction of lanes down to two, slower-traffic, and broad tree-lined public pathways along the north and south edges to frame the entry to the pier.

New landscaping, benches, lighting, and pavement were installed to match the rest of the design of St. Pete Pier. The goal of the improvements was to create a safe and inviting pedestrian experience in connecting the pier. Visitors can spend time at the solar-panel-covered Pier Marketplace, which features 22 local vendors, or keep strolling toward the pier via foot, bicycle, or the complementary tram.

At Spa Beach there is access to kayaking and swimming and at the end of the pier, there is a large fishing deck, created to ensure that locals can use the natural amenities of the Tampa Bay waterway.

Social Equity and Community Engagement

To create a future pier that would be committed to diversity and equity, planning for the new St. Pete Pier involved the most robust community engagement strategy the city has pursued to date. Mayor Rick Kriseman hand-selected a group of 21 diverse citizens to decide on the 10 key programmatic elements that would guide the pier's design.

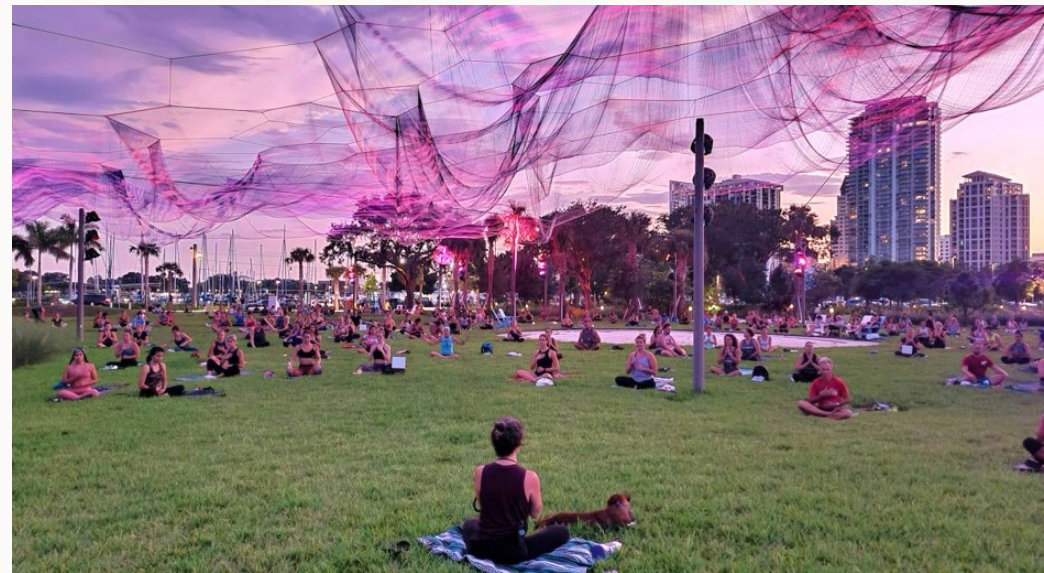
The working group members were selected based on their demonstrated history, knowledge, and commitment to the community. The elements identified by the group were fishing, observation, dining, shopping, playground, marine education, passive recreation, and event space.

Special committees also were formed to provide feedback in specific areas. A Pier Public Art Committee, composed of local artists and others in the art community, met for over two years to select the artists, resulting in four public art installations at the pier. An Education Advisory Team was also established to help identify educational opportunities within the Pier District, such as the environmental education center.

Beyond the core working group, a community-centered development process ensured opportunities for all neighbors of the pier to meaningfully influence the project. This dialogue was achieved through more than 200 presentations to school groups, neighborhood associations, business and civic groups, and downtown housing groups, including assisted living facilities for seniors.



The pier is completely pedestrian-friendly, with cars eliminated from that part of the pier that is over the water. Wide promenades allow cyclists, walkers, and trams to safely navigate the shared space. *(Rich Montalbano)*



Fitness classes are a daily routine at the pier, providing a safe and beautiful venue for various activities. This evening yoga class under the colorful, billowing arc provides a unique setting for exercise enthusiasts. *(Big City Events)*

Equity and inclusivity were fundamental tenets in the city's engagement strategy, both for general community input and active outreach to small and local businesses owned by people of color to encourage their participation in the Pier Marketplace, the retail anchor of the park.

The vendors are local startups with the majority owned by people of color, selected with the goal that the Marketplace could help them launch and grow their enterprises. All have been met with success to date—in the two years since the pier opened in July 2020, one of the vendors is looking for additional space to expand the business and another has opened a brick-and-mortar location downtown.

In addition, the city engaged a consultant team specialized in providing guidance on creating accessible spaces for people with disabilities. As a result, outdoor furniture throughout the park, as well as the playground, was designed with the philosophy of radical inclusion. This means that they go beyond minimum Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards to ensure that spaces such as the playground can be enjoyed by everyone.

The intentional focus on accessibility and how it informs the cultural and public vitality of the city and its public spaces was an important pillar of the St. Pete Pier. This project replaced a municipal pier conceived during times of social inequity with a project that is open to all for the enjoyment of all. Artist Janet Echelman's aerial sculpture, *Bending Arc*, is a striking reminder of this and pays homage to a Martin Luther King, Jr., quote: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."¹



Ten key elements, identified by a Pier Working Group composed of community members, factored into all design decisions for the pier. They include fishing; dining; marine education; retail; observation; courtesy docks; cycling, walking, jogging; transportation options; flexible event space, and bike and watercraft rentals.

Resilience and Sustainability

Environmental stewardship is at the core of the park. From its marine-themed playground and environmental education center to the incorporation of solar panels and overhanging roofs to extend the usable outdoor space, the St. Pete Pier honors the natural environment.

The pier incorporates green infrastructure to weave resilient design into the project. Stormwater management swales and ponds diversify the landscape and attract native plant and animal species. The waterbodies also keep the surroundings cool, and cleanse and purify the water. Also, no vehicles are allowed on the pier, which helps lower the greenhouse gas emissions for the city by creating a car-free zone.

Early in the process, the project team established a commitment to understanding and responding to the physical, economic, and social challenges presented by

climate change. Special attention has been paid to evaluating the overall vulnerability of St. Petersburg's infrastructure as well as socioeconomic systems to anticipate and adapt to the impacts of an already changing climate.

Given Florida's increased vulnerability to extreme weather, storm surge, sea-level rise, and the expected intensification of hurricanes, a coastal design and permitting company was enlisted to help the city make intentional and resilient design choices for the pier. The project is located in a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Coastal High Hazard Zone, so the St. Pete Pier deck elevation and structural design were based on water levels and forces associated with a 100-year storm event.

All structures have been elevated to 11.5 feet above sea level, which is three feet higher than the previous pier and several orders of magnitude of projected sea-level rise over the next 50 years. The pier's structural elements and buildings were also designed to withstand the wave and wind loading corresponding to the 100-year event, to withstand 155-mile-per-hour winds, equivalent to a category 4 hurricane.

The pier's resilient structural design was almost put to the test in September 2022, when Hurricane Ian was projected to make direct landfall in St. Petersburg. "We were extremely fortunate that Hurricane Ian did not produce the storm surge in Tampa Bay that was predicted two days before landfall," says Raul Quintana, architect for the city of St. Petersburg. "While we don't know what impact it may have had, we were confident that the pier was designed to withstand extreme hurricane forces and would remain stable for whatever Mother Nature may throw at it."

Funding

Due to the 15-year timeline and long-term vision for the park, funding was secured in multiple phases and through several financing mechanisms. The early design and preconstruction phases of the project were funded by the city of St. Petersburg with short-term debt (\$10 million).

The bulk of the rest of the funding came from an interlocal agreement between Pinellas County and the city of St. Petersburg as part of a larger Intown Redevelopment Plan (IRP). The IRP functioned as the city's guide to redeveloping and reinvigorating the lands between the downtown planning area and I-275, the major highway that connects the city to Greater Tampa Bay. The IRP had an approved budget of \$50 million. The interlocal agreement incorporated the ability to use tax increment financing as another lever, and so an additional \$20 million was obtained that way.

Given the community-wide benefit the pier brings to St. Petersburg, the city was able to leverage funds from many sources, including a citywide infrastructure fund that contributed nearly \$10 million worth of upgrades for necessary replacement and elevation of seawalls and roadway improvements. Private and philanthropic funds also were used, but on a much smaller scale (\$1.8 million).