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For Immediate Release

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Pinellas County Attains Green Government Recertification *FGBC Designation Confirms Environmental Stewardship*

(Tallahassee, FL) – Pinellas County has become the first county in the state to achieve recertification as a Florida Green Local Government after it successfully met the five-year recertification requirements and sustainability standards established in the Florida Green Local Government Certification program. Pinellas County achieved 55 percent of the 399 applicable points, earning it a gold-level designation.

The recertification, awarded by the Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC), signifies Pinellas County's commitment, since it first obtained certification in October 2006, to take on broader and more strategic responsibilities to create a vibrant and sustainable community for Pinellas County residents.

Suzanne Cook, FGBC Executive Director, said the designation demonstrates exemplary leadership by Commissioner Kenneth Welch and other elected officials who provided the framework and support to move forward with the process that helps to better manage the cost of government. "Their leadership in this effort will help protect and conserve the community's natural resources, enhance the efficiency of government thus reducing the cost to taxpayers, and raise public awareness about the benefits of environmental stewardship," Cook said. "Our membership applauds the County's dedication and commitment to the important ideals outlined in this program."

FGBC's Green Local Government Certification program is the only one of its type in Florida and is endorsed by the Florida Legislature, the Florida League of Cities and the Florida League of Mayors. Cook emphasized that this level of support emanates from the fact that there is a sizeable and compelling return on investment for any local government that chooses to initiate the process. "Depending upon the population of the community, the cost of this program

is between \$2,000 and \$6,000,” she said. “The cost savings and environmental benefits that can be achieved dwarf the initial expenditure.”

In order to achieve the FGBC Green Local Government recertification, Pinellas County staff, led by Ramona Madhosingh-Hector, Urban Sustainability Agent, undertook an extensive audit of the functions performed by every department within their government. The criteria included evaluations of energy and water usage, air quality, health issues, land use, recycling and waste disposal, maintenance policies, educational programs, purchasing practices, regulatory policies, and many others. From there teams used FGBC’s program tools to identify methods to improve the sustainability of their business practices and operations.

Cook said that there were significant and tangible accomplishments that will benefit taxpayers and the environment. “Through these efforts, there were reductions in operating costs and capital outlays, improvements in departmental communication, cooperation, and risk and asset management, a wealth of environmental benefits including measureable CO₂ reductions, and identification of programs that will improve community involvement and enhance sustainability throughout Pinellas County,” Cook noted.

In the case of Pinellas County, Cook listed just a few of the significant accomplishments that were achieved:

- Included the County’s environmental commitment in its mission statement and comprehensive plan, providing long-term direction for sustainability efforts.
- Developed and Implemented an environmentally preferred purchasing program (EPP)
- Employed green cleaning and maintenance procedures
- Offers free and discounted green products to the public
- Offers incentives for green certification of residential, commercial and land development projects
- Constructs and renovates government buildings to a green standard.
- Maintains a green fleet, utilizes alternative fuels in vehicles, and operates a local government alternative fueling station.
- Public beaches adhere to the Blue Wave Campaign criteria
- Utilizes solar and LED for street, crosswalk and traffic lights
- Monitors and tracks building energy use in the school district
- Involves students in green projects both within and outside the school
- Created a reclaimed water infrastructure

- Created an educational campaign for water conservation, including use of Florida Friendly Landscaping practices and rainwater harvesting.

Since the FGBC Green Local Government Certification program was launched, 45 Florida municipalities have achieved certification, with 11 others registered and in the process of certification. The program is performance based, not prescriptive, and all of the certified governments have found that many of their existing programs and policies contributed to the point total needed for certification. “This program is an opportunity for local governments to establish sustainable practices that can be carried out on a systematic basis, and sets in motion a process that will extend beyond election terms and protect the community for years to come,” Cook said.

Presentation of the award to Pinellas County officials will be held on March 12, 2013 at 9:30 a.m. during the County Commission meeting in the Pinellas County Courthouse, 315 Court Street in Clearwater.

The Florida Green Building Coalition is an independent, non-profit organization established in 2000 to promote sustainable building, development and business practices through voluntary green building certification standards and education. It has developed certification standards for residential, commercial, and land development projects, in addition to the local government certification program. Membership is open to any interested party. For more information about the FGBC Green Local Governments designation visit www.floridagreenbuilding.org.

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