

Palm Beach Boulevard Community Plan

A COMMUNITY PLAN FOR THE EAST LEE COUNTY COUNCIL &
THE PALM BEACH BOULEVARD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

VanasseDaylor . Planning & Design Group . Fort Myers . Florida

REPRESENTED BY



Acknowledgements

The VanasseDaylor Planning and Design Team would like to thank all of the committee members, government officials and citizens who contributed to this project.

Steering Committee Members

Clarence D. Bowman, Morse Shores Civic Association
Eileen Brennan, Morse Shores Civic Association
Mark Creel, Creel Tractor Company
Debrah Forester, Bonita Bay Group
Tammy Hall, City of Fort Myers, Council Member
Jim Reilly, Reilly Brothers, Inc.
Mike Roeder, East Lee County Council
Kim Skinner, Property Owner
Doug Vaught, East Lee County Council
Johnny Limbaugh, Florida Department of Transportation
Noel Vandiver, Russell Park Civic Association



Staff Participants

Kim Harris, City of Fort Myers, Council Office
Saeed Kazemi, City of Fort Myers
Jim Mudd, Planning Division, Lee County



VanasseDaylor Planning and Design Team

Daniel DeLisi, AICP, Project Manager
C. Chad Elkins, Visioning Coordinator

Tim Hancock, AICP
Noor Ismail
Reed Jarvi, PE (Transportation Engineering)
Jeff Jenkins, AICP
Brett Lemmon
Terri Melna
Bob Mitchell, RLA, CLARB
Mason Palmer
Brian Smith
Mary Rawl
Wayne Robinson, RLA
Agnes Tung



Urban Planning
Landscape Architecture
Civil Engineering
Traffic Engineering
Environmental Sciences
FL 366

Our thanks also to Robin Carver, The Bonita Bay Group, for donating time during the community charrette.

INTRODUCTION

The following plan aims to establish the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor as a revitalized vibrant commercial and residential community. The plan specifically addresses development west of Interstate 75 to Billy's Creek, encompassing areas within both the City of Fort Myers and unincorporated Lee County. The redevelopment of the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor has been the topic of discussion and debate for over a decade with the establishment of a Community Redevelopment Area for SR 80 and efforts by both the City of Fort Myers and Lee County to implement aesthetic enhancements through landscaping and façade improvements.

The East Lee County Council, a civic organization representing 16 neighborhood associations in East Lee County, joined with the Palm Beach Boulevard Development Corporation, an organization representing over 80 businesses along Palm Beach Boulevard, to create a land use plan for redevelopment. The two organizations established a Community Planning Panel to guide the process and ultimately ensure both the City of Fort Myers and Lee County follow through with implementation of the plan. The Community Planning Panel retained VanasseDaylor to facilitate a visioning process and assist in creating this plan based on consensus of all interested stakeholders.

Palm Beach Boulevard Community Plan

INDEX

| | | |
|------------|---|-----------|
| I | History/Background | 3 |
| II | Community Character | 4 |
| III | Community Visioning | 9 |
| IV | Redevelopment Ideas | 31 |
| V | Implementation Options | 45 |
| VI | Comprehensive Plan/Development Code Analysis | 50 |
| VII | Appendices | |

I History/Background

East Fort Myers and Tice can be characterized as an area of consistent under-achievement. The beauty of the waterfront along the Caloosahatchee River, the proximity to downtown Ft. Myers, transportation and transit access are all present, but the area has not yet been able to capture its full development potential.

East Fort Myers began as an area of great promise and the 1920's was a decade of much optimism. During that period, when the Riverside Park and Alabama Groves neighborhoods were developed, the population of East Fort Myers reached 3,000. In 1924, the Fremont Street Bridge, the first bridge across the Caloosahatchee River, was constructed providing, for the first time, automobile access across the river. In 1926, the Citizens Bank of Fort Myers constructed the area's first bank at the corner of Palm Beach Boulevard and Superior Street, and in 1927, the Seaboard Airline Railroad constructed a terminal on Riverside Drive. East Fort Myers formally incorporated as a City in 1925, but less than a year later annexed into the City of Fort Myers.

At the time, citrus farming and packing was an economic staple for Lee County and Fort Myers. In the early 1900's, much of the area east along Palm Beach Boulevard thrived on citrus farming. The Tice family, for whom the area is now known, owned and operated an orange grove and a packinghouse.

Since its brief heyday, the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor has been marked by unmet potential. Decline in the area continued and was further exacerbated in the 1980's during the widening of SR 80. Many of the commercial lots along SR 80 were originally platted as part of residential subdivisions and therefore, in many instances, contained little road frontage and shallow lot depths. When the Florida Department of Transportation widened SR 80, they acquired land for the expanded right-of-way, creating even shallower lot depths. The result has been parcels that are no longer viable for many types of commercial development.

In 1990, Lee County created a Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) for the county portion of the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor, extending east along SR 80 to the border of Alva. The CRA conducted planning studies in the early to mid-1990's for both Tice and the SR 80 corridor. Most of the problems identified by the studies still pervade the community today. Several residents commented that the only concrete accomplishment of the CRA was enhanced landscaping along the SR 80 corridor. The CRA's attempt to address façade improvements for structures along the corridor through a matching grant program failed from lack of participation.

With development pressure building along SR 80 east of I-75, residents have a renewed interest in planning for growth in East Lee County. Palm Beach Boulevard can benefit from the new residential development to the east, coupled with the recent resurgence of redevelopment activity in historic downtown Fort Myers to the west. The corridor has the potential of becoming the boulevard entryway and defining gateway into downtown and a commercial/recreational destination.



Pollock Lumber Company, started in 1923 in East Fort Myers (Board & Bartlett)



The Second Baptist Church (Riverside Baptist Church) built in 1928 at 2633 Tarpon Street (Board & Bartlett)



Edgewood School, built in 1911, destroyed by fire in the early 1980s (Board & Bartlett)

II Community Character

The Palm Beach Boulevard corridor study encompasses an area of approximately 4.2 square miles and is defined on the west by Billy's Creek and on the east by I-75. The area extends north of Palm Beach Boulevard up to the riverfront, and south to include areas along Tice Street and Billy's Creek. The corridor consists of several distinct features that define the character of the area, including Palm Beach Boulevard itself (SR 80), the strip commercial development along Palm Beach Boulevard, the railway track that bisects the neighborhood, the riverfront, and several distinct residential neighborhoods to the north and south of Palm Beach Boulevard. (See Appendix A)

The Palm Beach Boulevard corridor provides great potential for redevelopment. The riverfront provides an opportunity for leisure and recreational opportunities. The linear commercial strip along Palm Beach Boulevard connects I-75 to the historic downtown district of Fort Myers and has the possibility of becoming the central gateway to the City of Fort Myers, and a retail destination corridor.

The study area is diverse in that it consists of single-family suburban residential neighborhoods, multi-family apartment complexes, with both urban and suburban commercial sections. Undeveloped areas, vacant lots and green spaces could create opportunities for redevelopment. The area also has a mixture of transportation options including bicycle and pedestrian ways, public bus transit, private automobile, and the potential for rail transit.

In analyzing the community character for the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor, we have identified six physical areas that define the corridor and can be used as opportunities for redevelopment:

- Palm Beach Boulevard
- Railway Track
- Commercial Businesses
- Residential Neighborhoods
- Green Space, Open Space and Parks
- Waterfront



Entering the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor going east



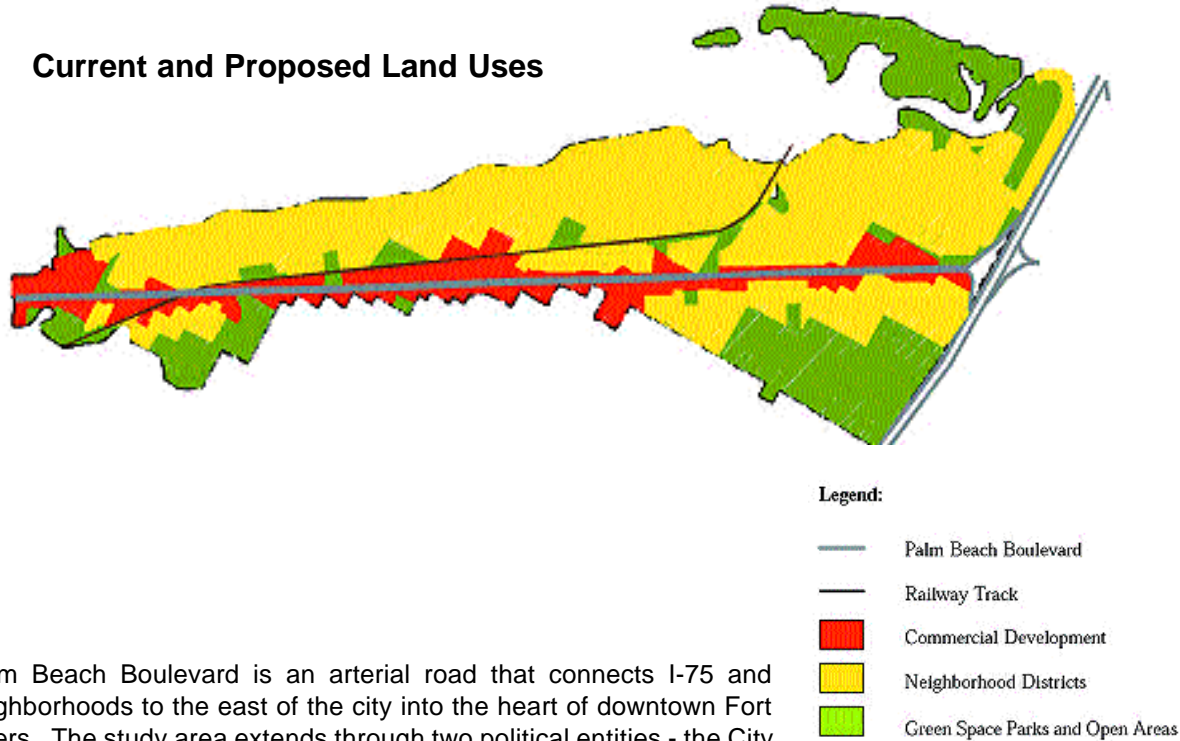
The Riverside Community Center on the Caloosahatchee River



The entry into the Morningside neighborhood

Palm Beach Boulevard

Current and Proposed Land Uses



Palm Beach Boulevard is an arterial road that connects I-75 and neighborhoods to the east of the city into the heart of downtown Fort Myers. The study area extends through two political entities - the City of Fort Myers to the west and unincorporated Lee County to the east. In traveling west on Palm Beach Boulevard, the entrance into the City of Fort Myers is accentuated by palm trees lining both sides of the road.

Palm Beach Boulevard begins on the west as a one-way three lane road, expands to five lanes with a center turn-lane and intensifies into a seven-lane expressway, with a 150 foot right-of-way on the easternmost portion. The broadening of the street to the east on Palm Beach Boulevard, without adequate streetscaping and appropriate traffic calming devices, creates a sterile perception of the roadway, described by one resident as an "airport runway." The lack of "intimacy" prompts motorists to drive swiftly through, and out of, the area, while inadequate pedestrian facilities and safety devices create one of the highest pedestrian/bicycle accident rates in Lee County. The types of businesses and the physical site design of retail



Palm Beach Boulevard looking west from I-75



Refurbished "Old Florida" house on the waterfront

stores along the Boulevard do not adequately attract walk-in customers for business and create a situation where promoters of downtown Fort Myers suggest alternative routes to enter the historic downtown. The corridor functions primarily to channel motorists speedily in and out of the City and does not enhance the economic potential of the businesses located along the Boulevard.

Railway Tracks

The railway tracks, while at one time servicing the transportation needs of the community, now create a barrier or line of division between the neighborhood districts and the commercial arterial districts - extending to the area around Bellair Road.

On the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor, the railway tracks are noticeably forgotten. Though physically visible, these railway tracks do not provide any significant role. The location of the tracks in the backyards of these neighborhoods, away from the public eye, further demean these areas. Common complaints among the residents deal with maintenance issues for the tracks. The railway tracks further segregate the neighborhood districts from the commercial areas. As the community rarely ventures beyond the tracks, it is difficult for residents to perceive their potential and their possible resourcefulness to the growth and development of the City of Fort Myers as well as these neighborhoods. Although the tracks are currently very limited in use, transit modes such as rail systems can become attractors for retail and office developments, provide alternative means of transportation to other areas of southwest Florida and stimulate development.

Commercial Establishments

The types and physical arrangements of commercial buildings neither stimulate nor encourage localized shopping within the community. Currently, undesirable commercial outlets comprising of used car dealers, RV dealers, and vacant commercial lots line the street front. During the community charrettes, the community expressed a desire for more shopping opportunities catering to their basic needs within the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor. Though there are shopping opportunities located along the street such as the Morse Shores Shopping Center and the East Fort Myers Shopping Center, the architectural form and physical layout of these outlets appear unappealing to the public and largely inaccessible to pedestrians. The general treatment of the commercial centers, due to setback requirements, reinforces the parking areas at the front and the location of the buildings to the rear of the sites. Additionally, the location of large asphalt parking areas along the corridor and the lack of streetscaping and traffic calming devices to slow down traffic inhibits the creation of, and attention to visual points of interest. The points of interest create "catchment/transitional" nodes or areas of interest that can potentially cause motorists to slow down, stop and shop. Without the creation of these nodes, the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor will not be able to siphon traffic into the commercial districts and regrettably will remain a traffic corridor that serves to channel automobiles in and out of the City of Fort Myers.



S.C.L. Railway tracks to the north of Palm Beach Boulevard



Reilly Bros., the former terminal for the Seaboard Airline Railroad, built in 1927



Street view of a major shopping center along the corridor

The existing and vacant commercial lots or buildings, due to lack of care and architectural treatments, depict blight within the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor. Interestingly, some of these buildings exemplify great potential. The Reilly Brothers establishment, for one, exudes great architectural potential. Given the right treatment and theme application along this corridor, these areas can potentially be revitalized and rehabilitated, hence reinforcing the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor as an entryway for the City of Fort Myers. However, business owners and managers raised operational constraints during the community charrettes that are noteworthy. Among the significant issues were the restrictive lot depths, the prevailing parking requirements and poor access, which they felt were limiting factors to the expansion and rehabilitation of their businesses.

Neighborhood Districts

The residential areas within the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor vary quite substantially by race, income, age of housing stock and housing type. The Boulevard physically divides the neighborhoods to the north and south of SR 80 with lower income neighborhoods to the south and more middle class neighborhoods to the north, in closer proximity to the riverfront. Residents perceive the area closer to the waterfront as safe, while areas along Palm Beach Boulevard and in the neighborhoods to the south of Palm Beach Boulevard are perceived as high crime areas.

There is an assortment of distinct identification markers at the entryways into these neighborhoods and community facilities within the individual neighborhoods. Some neighborhoods are lined with pedestrian sidewalks, on both or one side of the roadways, while some neighborhoods are totally without sidewalks. The sidewalks are not part of an extensive pedestrian network throughout the corridor and do not serve to link different residential neighborhoods, commercial outlets and recreational/green space areas. Some neighborhoods contain other facilities such as Russell Park's linear riverfront park.

Architecturally, the neighborhoods represent an array of vernacular styles; many are "Old Florida Style" or "Cracker", while others are of the typical southern architecture that one commonly finds in southwest Florida. The array of architectural styles is typically complementary and comparable to the other dwelling units found within the surrounding area. However, there are some derelict eyesores and decrepit structures within the community that do not blend in well with the surroundings.

The common complaint raised by the residents of the area is the general maintenance of the dwelling units within their locality. Residents raised other issues relating to poor street lighting, safety and crime issues, general maintenance and cleanliness, lack of code enforcement and lack of sidewalk/bicycle lanes.

Riverfront

Recreational activities such as canoeing, kayaking, and rowing exist along the Caloosahatchee River and Billy's Creek. Along this corridor there are only a few community areas located on the riverfront such as the Riverside Community Center, Tarpon Street Pier and the Russell Park boat launch.



Refurbished "Old Florida" cottage in Riverside area



Neighborhood sign



Bikepath and typical landscape along Edgewood Boulevard

Green Space, Open Space and Parks

There are small niches of green space, open space and parks located within the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor. However, there is no availability of pedestrian sidewalks or bicycle links that are easily accessible by the residents that extend to existing commercial areas. Residents can mainly access the parks and commercial areas by car.



View towards Tarpon Street Pier



The retention area at Palm Beach Boulevard and Seaboard



Recreational activities at the Riverside Community Center

III Community Visioning

Stakeholder Analysis: Methodology

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

The VanasseDaylor Design Team initiated the visioning process by interviewing a series of community leaders, business owners, developers, and government officials. Conducting personal interviews with various interest groups within the community is essential for accurately understanding the major issues facing the community. Additionally, identifying and including all stakeholder groups helped to ensure that the visioning process was organized and facilitated in an inclusive equitable manner and that the results of the visioning process represent an unbiased solution for a diverse cross-section of the community.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

The Planning Panel and VanasseDaylor organized a total of four (4) neighborhood workshops and three (3) community-wide workshops for the Palm Beach Boulevard Community. Mid-way through the stakeholder interview process, on September 20, 2001, the Palm Beach Boulevard Community Planning Panel and VanasseDaylor organized an introductory workshop to explain the visioning process to the community. The workshop provided a forum for the community to identify initial issues of concern.

Using the issues identified in the first community workshop and the results of the stakeholder interviews, VanasseDaylor organized workshops (mini-charrettes) with each of the four active Neighborhood Watch Groups/Civic Associations along the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor. The workshops were designed as "mini-charrettes" which consisted of a two hour hands-on visioning session. These workshops concentrated on the redevelopment of Palm Beach Boulevard as well as issues specific to each neighborhood. After completing the four neighborhood workshops, the Community Planning Panel identified four general issues of concern for in-depth discussion at the community design charrette - the second community-wide workshop. The community design charrette was a day long event held on January 26, 2002, to assist the community to graphically represent their ideas for the redevelopment of the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor.

The third workshop was designed as a follow up workshop to refine the information and begin drafting a development plan. The purpose was to solicit additional input on more specific topics that the community identified in the previous two workshops.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Participants of each workshop and charrette were asked to fill out a questionnaire, which was designed to identify perceived problems or constraints and opportunities within the Community.

Below are two photos from the community design charrette



Stakeholder Analysis: Stakeholder's Report, Responses and Recommendations

The Stakeholder Analysis and Report was the first step in a comprehensive public participation process for the Palm Beach Boulevard Redevelopment Plan. The Stakeholder Analysis, similar to a Conflict Assessment in the field of conflict resolution, is a commonly used tool in consensus building to ensure that all interests are represented before the initiation of the formal process. The report, originally drafted in the fall of 2001, provided recommendations on how the process can become more inclusive in order to create a plan that first, ultimately incorporates the visions and knowledge of a more diverse group, and second, has a broader base of support to aid in a smooth implementation process.

Interviews were conducted to examine the issues of concern to the community and to further identify the stakeholder groups. This report outlines the results of interviews conducted by VanasseDaylor staff to identify issues of concern to residents and property owners as well as identify the stakeholders that need to be involved in crafting a redevelopment plan for Palm Beach Boulevard. As such, the purpose of the Stakeholder Analysis had three primary objectives:

1. To give the consultant a general idea of the major issues of concern within the Palm Beach Boulevard Community.
2. To examine the current composition of the Community Planning Panel, identify the gaps in representation, if any, that exist and recommend people or strategies for diversifying the Community Planning Panel.
3. To introduce the process and expected product of a community plan to the community and begin building a relationship between the community and the consultants.

All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face with one to three interviewees. The interviewers used an aerial map to facilitate the discussions and provide a locational context for ideas. During the interviews, three major topics were discussed: 1) general issues of concern, 2) specific land uses, and 3) specific additional people who needed to be involved. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour, but varied from ½ to 2 ½ hours.

FINDINGS

During the interviews, participants were asked to identify general issues of concern to them and/or the community. City, county and state officials were asked to identify what issues they perceived the community to have and the impediments to solving problems that the community had identified. There was general agreement on problems faced within the community, though there was some disagreement on the desired land uses.

General Issues (Opportunities and Constraints)

Perception

Both residents and business owners expressed the feeling that the outside perception of Palm Beach Boulevard was negative and this negativity hampers the community's ability to attract new homeowners and new commercial opportunities. Residents and business owners as well as city officials believe that the City of Fort Myers markets Colonial Boulevard as the entryway to Fort Myers, rather than Palm Beach Boulevard. Interviewees felt that this deterred the potential customer base of the businesses and hurt the City's ability to have a real gateway into the downtown area.

The impact of the perception issue affects not only potential investors in the community, but the community's ability to provide input into the planning process. The negative perception creates a barrier for residents to imagine what they would ultimately be able to achieve from the planning process. We found that many residents were too inhibited by what they thought could not be achieved to express what they wanted. In other words, because the majority of commercial development along this corridor is limited to strip malls and car lots, many residents find it difficult to imagine even the possibility of other types of retail uses.

Code Enforcement/Appearance

Residents and business owners expressed a strong concern over the maintenance of existing properties. In general, residents spoke of absentee landlords who do not maintain their yards or homes, while business owners spoke of other businesses in need of repainting and facade improvements. Residents worry about homes that are deteriorating, excessive numbers of people living in a single unit, trash on front lawns, stray dogs and the degradation and negative impacts to property values that all of this causes.

Business owners shared the concern of code enforcement, but concentrated more on unsightly businesses. Several business owners felt very strongly that the businesses along the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor should be "clean and presentable." Residents living in unincorporated Lee County expressed frustration with code enforcement. Several people told stories of unresponsive code enforcement officers in unincorporated Lee County.

Areas within the City of Fort Myers have a distinct opportunity for enhanced code enforcement. Each Ward in Fort Myers has its own code enforcement officer. If codes exist that give the code enforcement officer the means to enforce them or work with property owners to bring residences and businesses in compliance, areas within the City boundary will have a strong mechanism for implementation. The areas along this corridor that are outside the city boundary are constrained by not having a specific code enforcement officer for their area. Moreover, Lee County has proportionally less code enforcement officers by geographic size than the City of Fort Myers.

Crime

Just about every interviewee expressed concern over excessive crime in the neighborhoods and along the commercial corridor. Prostitution, drug dealing and robbery were all issues of concern. Some suggested racially-based crime and the fear of getting robbed near check cashing establishments. Crime appears to be somewhat cyclical along the corridor, in that criminals are often pushed out of a policing district only to set up their illicit activity next door. Eventually they are pushed back into the area. This would warrant better coordination between city and county policing districts.

Many people mentioned areas where they felt criminal activity is most likely to occur. Generally, un-maintained open space areas with poor lighting and certain business establishments that acquiesce to illicit activity were mentioned.

Traffic

The need for traffic calming was one of the top priorities of almost everyone interviewed. The general perception is that Palm Beach Boulevard is used as a speedway. While the current speed limit is 45 miles per hour, vehicle speeds often exceed 60 miles per hour. Furthermore, there are few stoplights along the corridor. Several interviewees had witnessed automobile accidents along the corridor.

According to interviewees, there is also a lot of pedestrian traffic along Palm Beach Boulevard. Many residents do not own cars and therefore walk or ride the bus to the retail establishments. There are few crossing areas and pedestrians rarely use the intersections to cross the street. This, combined with high speed traffic, creates a dangerous situation. Traffic calming was at the top of the priority list for most interviewees who live or own businesses along the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor.

Representation

Most notably, we sensed a profound difference in the perception of government by the residents living in the city portion of the planning area from the residents living in the county portion of the planning area. Residents in the county expressed frustration with elected officials and the feeling that they were not represented. In the view of many residents, county government has been entirely unresponsive to this area and the needs of its residents. Furthermore, several residents in the county expressed a real desire to create a development process that was more inclusive with more opportunity for public involvement.

Within the city boundaries, representation and involvement in the development process was simply not an issue. When asked, residents in the City did not indicate having a problem with the current land development process. While increased participation in the planning process along with increased interaction with county staff and county code enforcement was an issue in the county, it was not an issue in the City.

Unwanted Uses

Few people expressed specific problems with land uses. Generally, interviewees believed that the specific land use was less important than the appearance of that land use. Although several residents wanted to further restrict used car dealerships, many differentiated between aesthetically pleasing car dealerships that maintained their buildings and designed the lots to be more architecturally and structurally pleasing with dealerships that do not care about community appearance. Some residents expressed the feeling that the nature of the land uses - the car dealerships, feed store, etc. need to change entirely before any meaningful redevelopment occurs.

Within the residential neighborhoods, residents generally did not want multi-family housing. Many people were not adverse to the housing type itself, but the perception is that multi-family units more often attract rentals and are less likely to be owner occupied. Some residents also expressed worries that larger structures would be located adjacent to single-family homes.

Specifically Desired Uses

Those interviewed expressed a desire to see a revitalized commercial area. The perception by many is that people who live in the neighborhoods to the north of Palm Beach Boulevard do not shop along Palm Beach Boulevard because they find it dirty. Therefore, cleanliness of current uses was the major issue. Over and above that, residents expressed interest in non-fast food restaurants, food stores and other neighborhood retail uses. "Big box" retail was also mentioned (Wal-Mart and Home Depot), but perhaps to be located east of I-75. The main point was that residents wanted more shopping opportunities along this corridor, and did not want to leave the community to fulfill most of their shopping needs.

Open Space

There was a lot of diversity of opinions regarding open space. Some of those interviewed thought that increased open space and parks should be a priority of the plan, while others specifically did not want any new parks or open space. There were several very specific ideas for new park areas. Several people independently discussed either turning the railroad tracks into a linear park or building a linear park along the tracks. This park could be a connector between a few identified larger park areas. In addition, areas for potential open space were identified on the aerial map along Palm Beach Boulevard that could attract people to the surrounding businesses.

Many people thought, however, that open space was not a priority at all, or believed that additional open space or parks could be detrimental to the neighborhoods. Residents believed that current parks are not maintained and have only turned into areas for illicit and criminal activity. Therefore, any new open spaces would only add to the crime problem that already exists. Furthermore, residents did not want to see open spaces or public access ways along the waterfront. Many expressed the concern that open areas along

the waterfront would attract visitors from outside the neighborhood and criminal activity. If open spaces were to be developed, they would need to be well-maintained by the city or county, with adequate policing.

Mixed-Use Environments

One unique aspect and potential opportunity for this community is the location of single-family residential neighborhoods in close proximity to commercial areas. In the interviews, it was discovered that self-contained mixed-use development was not a priority of residents. However, many expressed a strong interest in seeing better pedestrian access from residential areas to commercial areas, including sidewalks and other safe, well-lit pedestrian/bicycle ways.

Landscaping

Landscaping in the residential areas of the plan was not a major issue with those who were interviewed. Along Palm Beach Boulevard, there was a mix of concern over landscaping. Some thought that the current landscaping was adequate. Others expressed concern over the type of landscaping and the width of the landscaped area. Several expressed concern that the arrangement of the palm trees and the spacing created a tunnel effect, blocking views of commercial businesses and creating hazardous situations. Many people expressed a negative reaction to previously failed attempts by the City to better landscape Palm Beach Boulevard. Several people mentioned the need for enhanced lighting.

Waterfront

The SR 80 corridor is a waterfront community. Many residents to the north of SR 80 are boaters and the river acts as a large attractor for prospective homebuyers. Although limited, there are several areas along the corridor with public access. The Riverside Community Center provides a real waterfront amenity for the community and an attraction for outsiders to come into the community. The existing waterfront activities, such as canoeing, kayaking and rowing, should be encouraged as they provide low-impact recreational opportunities for the community. Currently, the Tarpon Street Pier to the east of the Riverside Community Center provides access for fishing. Russell Park has a linear park along the river that acts as a neighborhood amenity, although residents complain that it also attracts illicit activities. The park provides waterfront access and value to those in Russell Park who do not live directly on the water.

SR 80 and Shopping Opportunities

Many participants in the planning study expressed a desire to see a revitalized commercial area. In revitalizing commercial nodes and creating shopping areas, the level of automobile and pedestrian traffic

along SR 80 provides a large opportunity through an existing customer base. Additionally, the proximity of residential uses to commercial uses also provides an opportunity to attract neighborhood retail establishments and create mixed-use nodes, where access between residential uses and neighborhood retail establishments is easy and convenient. SR 80 is a main east-west route across the state for tourism and this also provides an opportunity for the area by becoming a well traveled corridor with a large customer base.

Historical Buildings

The Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor has a history that can be used to recreate the area's identity. Buildings and informational signs can be used to capture the history and tell a story for visitors. Heritage planning is a useful tool in creating a sense of place.

The following were additional issues that interviewees mentioned:

- Need for redevelopment on the south side of Palm Beach Boulevard
- Need for Palm Beach Boulevard to be commercially healthy and attractive
 - All neighborhoods would benefit from this
- Buffers between residential and commercial must be adequate to protect the character of residential areas/districts
- Restrictions on types of commercial development
- Existing communities need to be upgraded
- Commercial projects should fit lot size
- Aiming for US 41 in Naples type atmosphere
- Need to look at infrastructure, ramps on I-75
- Green spaces ok - not 1st priority, don't want to deal with the liability of a park
- Every community should have a park, but it needs to be well maintained
- The negative perception of Palm Beach Boulevard is a problem
- In older section, commercial buildings run down
- Require improved code enforcement
- Palm Beach Boulevard is a divider between neighborhoods

- Don't have problems with land use, concerned with aesthetics
- North neighborhoods not shopping along Palm Beach Boulevard is a big loss
- Unclean along Palm Beach Boulevard
- Third world conditions south of Palm Beach Boulevard
- Large percent of auto related businesses - need limitations
- Palm Beach Boulevard should be the Gateway into downtown
- Want a median
- Want bus loading areas and bus depots
- Need pavers to define pedestrian areas
- Need something to draw people here
- Need more sound zoning, now it is a hodgepodge of unit types and land uses

Data and Analysis

The GIS maps located in Appendix C at the end of this document were used in researching and analyzing site related data in order to generate and consider the feasibility of ideas. The zoning and future land use maps provided a description of the current land uses that are permitted in both the City of Fort Myers and the Lee County areas. The demographic maps give a clear indication and confirm the population shifts occurring along this corridor. Finally, the bicycle and pedestrian accident maps were useful in understanding the community's desire for traffic calming and safer roadway conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Map # / Title

1. Existing Zoning
2. Future Land Use Map
3. Fire, EMS and School Locations
4. Population Density
5. Demographics - Hispanic Population - 1990
6. Median Age - 2000
7. Demographics - Hispanic Population - 2000
8. Demographics - Racial Composition
9. Bike and Pedestrian Accidents - West of I-75
10. Bike and Pedestrian Accidents - East of I-75
11. FDOT Crash Data
12. Impact Fee Zones

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Boundary

The boundary of the planning area will have a large impact on the outcome of the plan. Defining boundaries usually helps delineate who is involved in the process and who is not. For example, if the boundary of the plan only included the Edgewood neighborhood, residents from Morse Shores would not be involved. Planning boundaries are usually established as a result of an analysis of existing conditions in the community and projected outcomes of a planning process. The mixture of uses and neighborhoods within a given area and the distinct character that this mixture produces define our communities. Although the analysis of existing conditions and projected future outcomes of a plan are established during the planning process, precise planning boundaries are not usually established until the middle or end of the process. Boundaries should be left vague and the process should be as inclusive as possible during the initial stage of the planning process.

The purpose of the Stakeholder Analysis was, in part, to examine the initial composition of the Community Planning Panel and the organizations involved with crafting the community plan. Through analyzing the community stakeholders we can ensure that the process includes all interests groups, and if necessary, we can recommend changes to the process and composition of the Community Planning Panel.

By setting the boundary before the planning process was underway, the Community Planning Panel had potentially limited certain stakeholders from actively participating in the process of redeveloping the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor. At the start of the process, we defined the residential neighborhoods to the north of Palm Beach Boulevard as stakeholders in the redevelopment of the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor, but did not include the residents to the south of Palm Beach Boulevard as stakeholders, because those neighborhoods were not included in the boundaries set for this planning area.

In conducting the initial interviews, several people mentioned the planning boundary itself as a problem. Individuals outside the boundary wanted to be included, individuals who work for the City of Fort Myers believed that the neighborhoods to the south not only had more of a need for redevelopment but had more of a nexus with the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor, and several residents to the north of Palm Beach Boulevard believed that they and their neighbors were less of a customer base for the businesses along the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor than their neighborhoods to the south.

In a planning process, we believe it is more important to include a stakeholder interest than confine the effort to a specious geographic boundary. In other words, if the community wanted to do a plan for only the redevelopment of Palm Beach Boulevard itself, the surrounding neighborhoods would need to be included as stakeholders, but the neighborhoods themselves would not necessarily need to be included as areas for redevelopment within the plan. Therefore, we felt it was beneficial for the Palm Beach Boulevard Community Plan to include the residents who live in the neighborhoods to the south of Palm Beach Boulevard as stakeholders regardless of whether or not their properties were within the geographically determined planning boundary. From our analysis and the opinions of several people interviewed,

the absence of residents south of Palm Beach Boulevard was a major shortfall in the composition of the Community Planning Panel, which could have had a negative impact on the outcome of the plan itself and the implementation of the plan.

Another shortcoming in the original composition of the Community Planning Panel was the lack of diversification of people within the existing boundary. While the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor appears to have a large Hispanic population and several Hispanic businesses, there was no representation from the Hispanic community on the Planning Panel nor has there been significant representation as yet at the public meetings.

In conducting interviews, we found difficulty in finding organized groups within the Hispanic community that could potentially be partners in the planning process. We were however, able to meet with two community leaders, a business owner and a representative from the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Diversity in the support for the plan will help during the implementation stage of the process, while a lack of diversity can hinder efforts to implement the final plan.

In analyzing the composition of the Community Planning Panel, interviewees identified two other more minor shortcomings. First, the area between Tice Street and I-75, to the south of Palm Beach Boulevard is included in the planning boundary. However, there has been very little contact with the residents and property owners in that area. Second, a few residents of Russell Park strongly advocated for direct representation on the Community Planning Panel. Those residents believed that the Russell Park Civic Association should be able to appoint a representative. For this reason, we made special efforts to interview people along Tice Street and include an official representative from the Russell Park Civic Association on the Panel.

Participation of Government

To ensure that implementation of the plan is feasible and realistic, it was essential that the proper representatives from government agencies be part of the process as early as possible. Because Palm Beach Boulevard is a state road, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) needed to be a major partner in its redevelopment. We met with FDOT to discuss the plan, some of the ideas that had been mentioned up to that point, and their involvement. FDOT expressed a strong interest in being involved and in fact was eager to become involved at the front end of the planning process. This plan has an added advantage that the Director of the SW Florida office of FDOT and the Community Relations Officer are both residents along the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor. They both expressed a personal interest in the plan's success, and have since been participants.

City staff has been active in the planning process and that trend is expected to continue during the implementation process. The Community Planning Panel should ensure county staff representation at all Community Planning Panel meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS (Excerpted from the Fall 2001 Stakeholder Analysis Report)

The following were our recommendations in the Stakeholder Analysis Report:

“The most important phase of the community planning process begins with the design and organization of the community charrette. Through the charrette, we gain specific understanding of community concerns and desires that would potentially assist us in the drafting of the community plan. After the charrette, the follow up workshops and Community Planning Panel meetings will help further refine the plan. Therefore it is essential that the participants in the design charrette and follow up meetings are a representation of all stakeholders in the redevelopment of Palm Beach Boulevard and the neighborhoods within the planning boundary.

We therefore recommend the following:

The Community Planning Panel should include the residents of the neighborhoods to the south of Palm Beach Boulevard as a stakeholder group and through increased notification, include these residents as equal participants.

The Community Planning Panel should specifically target outreach efforts towards the Hispanic community and the Hispanic businesses along Palm Beach Boulevard. It was the recommendation of one community leader to find ways to include the Hispanic clergy in the planning process.

The Community Planning Panel should be expanded to include diversification of representatives from the south of Palm Beach Boulevard. Due to concerns from the Russell Park Civic Association, the Community Planning Panel should be expanded to include a representative from that group.

In organizing meetings, the Community Planning Panel should encourage the on-going attendance of Florida Department of Transportation and staff representatives from Lee County and the City of Fort Myers.”

Interviewees:

Residents North of Palm Beach:

- Clarence Bowman
- Eileen Brennen
- Vincent Brennen
- Kim Skinner
- Dot Smith
- Chester Young
- Noel Vandiver
- Doug Vaught

Residents South of Palm Beach:

- Janelle Cook
- Steve Cook
- Kim Holschar

Business Owners:

- Mark Creel, Creel Tractor
- Jim Reilly, Reilly Brothers
- John Taylor, Taylor Carpet
- Moises Ruiz, Pueblo Food Center

Government/Elected Officials:

- Tammy Hall, Councilwoman
- Don Paight, Downtown Redevelopment Agency
- Saeed Kazemi, Ft. Myers City Engineer
- Mike Rippe, Florida Department of Transportation
- Johnny Limbaugh, Florida Department of Transportation
- Shaye Prather, Ft. Myers
- Mike Titmus, Community Police Officer
- Bill Roy, Community Code Enforcement Officer
- Matt Noble, Lee County Planning Division
- Brandy Gonzalez, Lee County Planning Division

Developers:

- Debrah Forester, Bonita Bay Group
- Andy Messick, Messick Construction Company
- Steve Luta, Remax

Non-Profit:

- Mike Roeder, East Lee County Council, Home Ownership Resource Center
- Israel Suarez, Nations Association
- Reverend Felicino
- Lucy Felicino

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops

Following the stakeholder interviews and the initial community workshop, VanasseDaylor along with the Community Planning Panel identified major themes (design problems) for the neighborhood workshops and the community design charrette. Each facilitator researched the themes as they applied to the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor to facilitate discussion. At the beginning of the full day charrette, VanasseDaylor gave an educational presentation with planning ideas and possibilities to prepare the community for each issue.

Each community member was given a packet with a number that corresponded to a design problem, placing approximately 20 people in each group with a VanasseDaylor facilitator. Each design problem team had a set time to brainstorm for solutions. At the close of the brainstorming session, each group submitted their solutions, which consisted of both words and concepts in bulleted form and graphic sketches that were used to facilitate discussion and formulate ideas. The sketches provided the facilitators with concrete illustrations of the community's vision for the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor.

Provided in this report are both the bulleted verbiage and graphic sketches. In addition, each community member who attended the workshops or charrette was asked to submit their responses to pre-determined questions. The questions and responses are provided in this summary packet.

Below are photos from the neighborhood workshops



Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #1

Problem #1 was designed to gather specific information about perceptions of the community's streets and architectural features. Multiple types of roadways and architectural elements were defined within the neighborhoods.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

- Application of distinct community characteristics throughout with no distinct barrier between city and county limits
- Commercial outlets to cater towards community needs. The community does not want more used car lots along Palm Beach Boulevard
- Retail and commercial outlets not to be screened totally from neighborhoods but to provide pedestrian links from neighborhoods
- Infill and rehabilitation of vacant and existing commercial lots
- Distinct community streetlights with festive colored banners on Palm Beach Boulevard
- Architectural style - Old Florida, vernacular type architecture
- Colors to be off-white and warm colors
- Commercial signage to be earth mounted - not pole-vaulted. Details to be worked out on signage.
- Demarcation of smaller neighborhood communities within Palm Beach Boulevard through consistent gateway markers
- Other observations: Business owners of Retail/Commercial outlets are unable to expand their businesses due to lack of parking spaces and buildable area
- City and County based incentives to spur necessary commercial activities within Palm Beach Boulevard
- Provide on-site and off-site pedestrian links from neighborhoods into these commercial establishments. Dual frontage of commercial outlets to be considered. This proposal would allow secondary back street parking on these roads accessing commercial outlets.
- Streetscape to include palm trees interspersed with other canopy trees, in setting of a distinct communal characteristic theme for Palm Beach Boulevard
- Proposed infill and rehabilitation of vacant and existing commercial retail outlets on Palm Beach Boulevard with proposed architectural theme articulation. (Refer to proposed artist illustrations on rehabilitation and revitalization of commercial shop-fronts)

COMMUNITY VISIONING ILLUSTRATIONS OF VARIOUS STREET SECTIONS ALONG PALM BEACH BOULEVARD



A. Commercial frontage and sidewalks with decorative awnings for shade and aesthetic purposes



B. Divided roadway with a landscaped median and planted strips separating the roadway from the sidewalks



C. Roadway cross section west of Seaboard

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #2

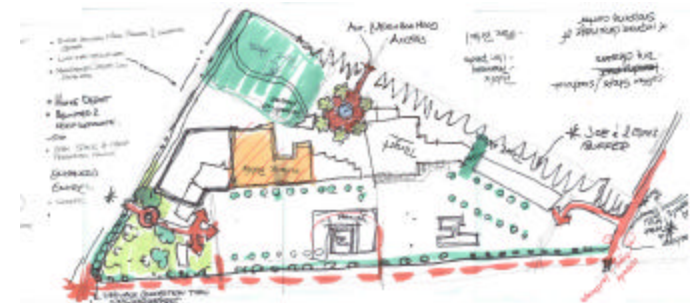
Problem #2 was designed to gather specific information about the interaction of residential and commercial areas within the community. An understanding of mixed-use compatibility of residential and commercial uses and how integration of uses can affect a community was presented to the group.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

- Community receptive to the idea of potential mixed use developments located within specific nodes identified on Palm Beach Boulevard corridor
- Lack of pedestrian crossing at traffic signals
- Russell Park - too many access points into neighborhoods
- Reduce number of car lots, proposed joint parking lots
- Discourage access to commercial lots along Palm Beach Boulevard, access from service lanes, rear of proposed commercial structures
- Not receptive to commercial development along waterfront but not opposed to allowing higher density of residential development
- Not receptive to tower residential development
- Morse Shores Shopping Center - not a good location for mixed use but would like it revitalized, and rehabilitated
- Better access from neighborhoods to commercial centers



Charrette sketch showing landscaping along Palm Beach Boulevard and commercial parcels with shared parking



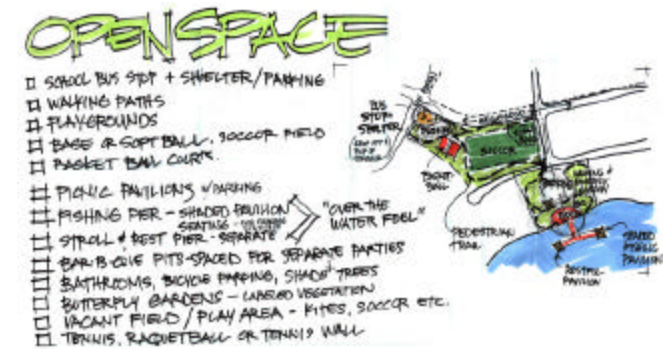
Charrette sketch showing access from neighborhoods into commercial areas with vegetated buffers

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #3

Problem #3 was designed to determine if the open space and green space needs of the community are being met and what types of open space and green space opportunities were needed in the neighborhoods.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

- No adequate facilities and amenities such as public phones, restrooms, bicycle parking and rubbish bins
- Inadequate lighting
- No security measures
- Incorporate walkways/walking trails
- Parks
- Sitting areas beside river
- Public boat docks and ramps
- Picnic tables and pavilions
- Barbecue pits
- Parking areas
- Preserve and maintain trees
- Preserve Tarpon Pier
- Do not want river views to be sealed/blocked off from the road
- Adequate and appropriate location of school bus-stops/shelters for parking
- Basketball courts
- Fishing piers
- Butterfly gardens
- Sports amenities - baseball, soccer, tennis, racquetball etc
- Playgrounds



OPEN SPACE & GREENSPACE OPPORTUNITIES:

- PUBLIC BOAT DOCKS / BOAT RAMPS - TARPON BARK PIER - MAINTAINED
- PARK AREAS
- MAINTAIN TREES
- WALKWAYS
- BIKE PATHS
- JOGGING TRAIL
- FACILITIES IN GREEN AREA
- TRASH BINS
- PUBLIC PHONES
- SIDEWALKS
- BENCHES
- MAINTENANCE
- TRAFFIC CALMING DEVICE - SUBSTITUTE SPEED BUMPS WITH INNOVATIVE DEVICES
- ROUNDABOUTS
- MEANDERING STREETS
- PICNIC AREAS
- BARBECUE PITS
- SECURITY - ADEQUATE LIGHTING
- PHYSICAL PRESENCE - POLICE

Community open space “wish lists” during the neighborhood workshops

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #4

Problem #4 was designed to determine how the community feels about the S.C.L. Railway. To complete this problem, the S.C.L. Railway was featured and the impacts on the community were discussed.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

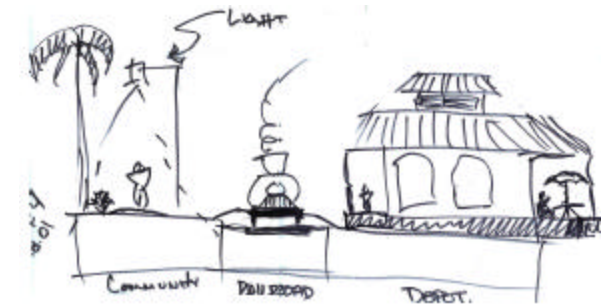
- Not viewed as a major issue
- Maintenance problem of the railway easement - would like to see it clean
- Do not want any shelters that will accommodate undesirable elements such as the homeless, or promote illegal activity
- Train ride undesirable
- Pedestrian walkway and greenway along side rail-tracks
- Incorporation of landscaping buffers
- Wanted access to dinner train in the community



S.C.L. Railway



Visioning sketch depicting the commercial areas separated from the residential areas by a linear park along the current train tracks



Visioning sketch depicting the transition from commercial to a train/park system with a train stop

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #5

Problem #5 was designed to determine how the community feels about waterfront development or redevelopment. Types of uses of new and redevelopment were explained to determine if these uses were compatible with the community.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

- Not viewed as a major issue
- Was viewed as an attraction to illegal drug and criminal traffic
- Access for the public was not an important factor
- Some community members wanted access to the river
- No high rise developments should be permitted near the river
- Pedestrian access should be permitted only in limited areas
- If public development were to occur, then open expansive spaces should be provided for views to river
- If public development were to occur, then no structures should be provided to allow areas for illegal drug or criminal activity



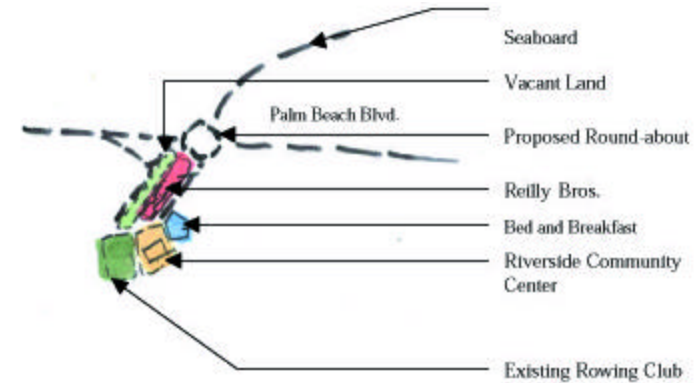
Conceptual sketch of a waterfront park area

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #6

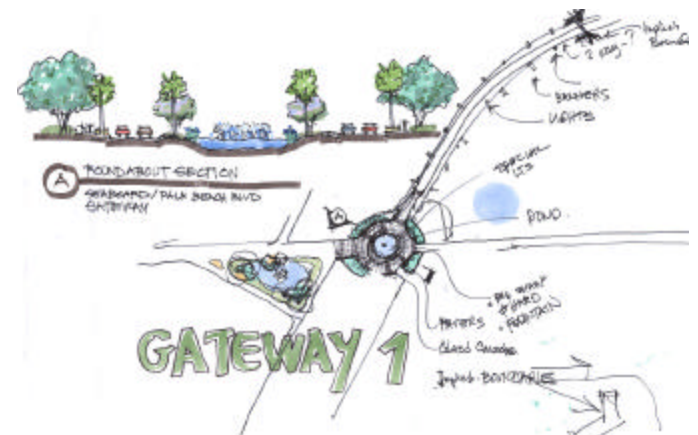
Problem #6 was designed to gather specific information about attractors to the community and the need for a gateway to define the identity of East Fort Myers. The multiple types of roadways and design elements within the community and the general perception of the community were identified and listed. Gateways were explained as community identity features defining boundaries at entryways.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

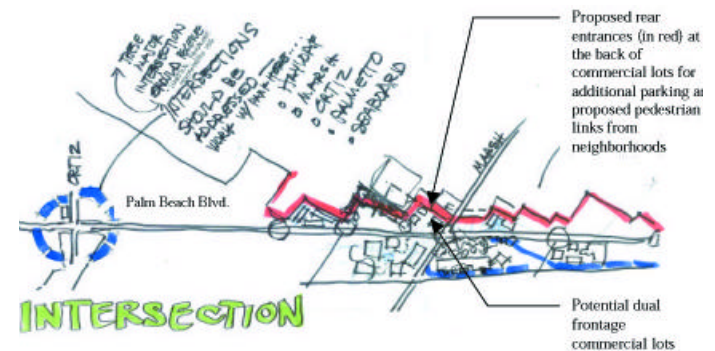
- Proposed gateway concepts into community
- Proposed roundabout at the Seaboard intersection; a roundabout might have water and aquatic elements that would relate to the corresponding lake in the area; the proposed concept also suggests other upscale commercial uses for the Reilly Bros. building (shopping, restaurants etc.) that will tie in to the waterfront, the Riverside Community Center as well as the bed and breakfast establishment in the area
- Gateway concept at Seaboard/Palm Beach Boulevard intersection; banners and communal characteristic street lighting on bridge on Seaboard prior to entry onto Palm Beach Boulevard; aquatic water elements in the center of proposed roundabout as focal point; corresponding water element on vacant site adjacent to Reilly Bros. structure to anchor theme
- Demarcation of the Palm Beach Boulevard Community through gateway markers into the community at major identified nodes not limited to the following - Seaboard, Ortiz, Marsh, Palmetto and Hayloft intersections
- Repetitive potential roundabout treatment at other possible traffic nodes at Ortiz, Marsh, Palmetto and Hayloft intersections



Concept of a gateway at Seaboard and Palm Beach Boulevard



Concept of a gateway at Seaboard and Palm Beach Boulevard



Development of nodes at major intersections along Palm Beach Boulevard

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #7

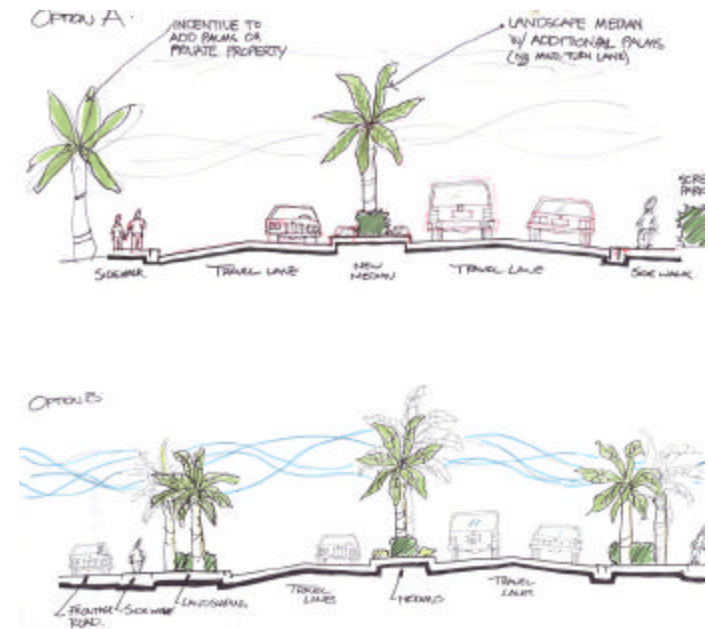
Problem #7 was designed to gather specific information about the potential for roadway and related landscape changes to Palm Beach Boulevard with particular attention to pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular safety.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

- Community is receptive to the potential for roadway and related changes to Palm Beach Boulevard
- Safety to be a high priority issue
- Road widening to take into consideration the ugly appearance of existing commercial structures; requires rehabilitation and revitalization projects of existing façade
- Unsightly signage and lack of maintenance contributes to unattractiveness
- Pedestrian crossings to be located at intersections with traffic signals
- Bicycles - there exists a severe conflict in terms of bicycles and other motorized vehicular circulation; extreme unsafe conditions
- Unattractive signage can be distracting. Reduce "information overload"
- Control / reduce the following - information signage, parked cars, utilities, merchandising and others, along entire length of the boulevard
- A lack of design continuity and cohesiveness in the corridor - disorganized
- Too many commercial curb cuts
- The need to slow down traffic
- How will improvements be maintained?
- Do not like speed bumps on Edgemont, prefer roundabouts and meandering streets and other traffic calming \ devices
- Remove multi directional, center, travel lane and replace it with landscaped median

(See Zones in Appendix A)

- Zone 1 (3-lane section): Reinforce and re-establish the existing royal palm tree concept along "flow zones" of Palm Beach Boulevard in the public right of way. Develop incentives to plant royal palm trees on adjacent privately owned parcels



Visioning options for Palm Beach Boulevard streetscaping

- Zone 2 (5-lane section): Develop primary intersections as "high visibility safety zones" with reduced landscape planting and a contrasting landscape character to "flow zones". The use of potential traffic calming devices could be utilized to help slow traffic down, i.e. hardscape paver areas to designate these 'high visibility intersections'
- Zone 3 (7-lane section): Develop "entrance zones" at the connection to I-75 with a special landscape character emphasizing arrival to a distinct neighborhood community and encouraging a decrease in travel speeds - for traffic coming off I-75

Charrette and Neighborhood Workshops: Design Problem #8

Problem #8 was designed to gather specific information about community safety issues faced by the commercial businesses along Palm Beach Boulevard and surrounding neighborhoods, understanding how environmental design can affect criminal activity and safety for the community.

The responses and recommendations were as follows:

- The neighborhoods to the south of Palm Beach Boulevard have a higher crime problem
- The residential areas along the river and a few blocks south of the river are very safe
- Crime is not an issue in the Morse Shores neighborhood
- The intersection of Palm Beach Boulevard and Marsh, and the intersection of Palm Beach and Ortiz are areas of high crime and prostitution
- The residential areas directly to the north of the East Fort Myers Shopping Center were identified as high crime areas
- In designing open space areas, we need to incorporate safety features of maintained landscaping that does not create areas for people to hide behind and areas to attract criminal activity (see picture to the right)
- Benches, bus stops and areas with street furniture need to be designed to discourage use as sleeping areas
- Street lighting must be better designed to produce a safer street - currently, the street lights do not create light in crime infested areas, nor do they create a perception of safety around the existing businesses
- Need to examine access into the neighborhoods and potentially control access to deter criminal activity



An example of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design - the height of vegetation does not block view corridors (National Crime Prevention Council)

IV Redevelopment Ideas

Redevelopment Plan

The image of the Palm Beach Boulevard was of central importance to the residents and business owners in the area. Outsiders, and even some living and working in the area, perceive the corridor as a danger zone, a decrepit neighborhood that is entirely aesthetically unappealing. At one meeting, a resident expressed dismay that a consultant for downtown Fort Myers referred to the Palm Beach Boulevard as a corridor that detracts from historic downtown. Focusing attention on elements of the corridor that can change the image will be essential in redevelopment.

Historical Connection

Creating a sense of place is the basis for revitalizing the image of the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor. East Fort Myers has a historical identity that should be displayed in public areas. Places become more attractive when a visitor can see that the place means something. For instance, Boston's downtown waterfront is littered with wharfs extending out into the Boston Harbor. The historical value of place will make one wharf more significant than another.

When people visit a place, the area becomes more attractive if there is information attached to that place. What was this neighborhood or area like 50 years ago? What was this building's original purpose? Providing additional reasons for people to visit the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor and discovering meaning in their visit will help reinvent the corridor as an attractor.

There are currently many opportunities to display historical significance or identity to the corridor. Signage and informational kiosks strategically located could tell the story of how East Fort Myers developed from an independent city with a City Hall located at the current Terry Park to annexing into the City of Fort Myers. Commercial structures at key intersections historically used for retail activity and trade, such as the intersection of SR 80 and Superior Street, could convey a restored sense of place to the area. Individual buildings such as Reilly Brothers could use identification signs to describe the historic railroad that used the building as its depot. Re-establishing a positive identity for an area through recapturing historic roots is a common tool for urban redevelopment.

Waterfront

The outside image of the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor is not reflective of its reality as a beautiful waterfront community. Many participants in the visioning process expressed a desire for improved mainte-



Sketch of the community center at Terry Park with a kiosk and seating area to provide information on historic East Fort Myers



The above sign decorates the Pilot House on Boston's waterfront, attaching a historic identity to this otherwise undistinguishable office building

nance, security, enhanced access points and adequate street lighting for existing river access sites such as the Tarpon Pier. The residents expressed a need for picnic benches, barbecue pits and lookout points for the delineated recreational areas along the riverfront. The residents also requested that any development located on the waterfront be creatively designed as to not obstruct the view of the riverfront.

Cultural Identity through Retail

Establishing a new identity is essential in creating a sense of place and enhancing the perception of the area. What do we want the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor to be known for? Some parts of the community will be known for the waterfront - the Riverside Community Park and the existing linear park in the Russell Park neighborhood will continue to give residents a sense of attachment and relation to the river. Recapturing a historic identity will help distinguish this area from others and convey to visitors what this area once was. Showing what this area is now is just as important. The perceived constraint of rapid cultural and racial change to the area can be turned into a real opportunity. Many urban areas have created identity through taking advantage of cultural trends. Certain restaurants and malls have a distinctly Hispanic flavor. Certain nodes can become the Hispanic cultural area by creating a mix of cultural and retail establishments focusing on Hispanic culture. These can include an office for the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, restaurants, food stores and specialty gift shops.

All of these elements currently exist along the corridor, including "Sabor de la Isla" at the eastern end of the corridor and the Pueblo Food Center at the western end of the corridor. What needs to happen is that these uses need to be established as more of a cohesive unit and more concentrated locations and promoted as a special attraction largely unique to this corridor.



The residential neighborhoods along the waterfront

PHASING

As the residents and businesses along Palm Beach Boulevard look to redevelop the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor with the assistance of Fort Myers and Lee County, the following is a recommended phasing plan to facilitate the goals of the Palm Beach Boulevard Community Plan. Phasing should happen on two parallel tracks - governmental efforts to improve the safety and aesthetics of the roadway itself, and private efforts to recreate the image of the corridor and promote redevelopment.

Phase I

The first step in the redevelopment of Palm Beach Boulevard is to create a Business Improvement District, a formal organization that spans across the City/County border with the mission of overseeing and working toward the redevelopment of Palm Beach Boulevard. There needs to be a group of people willing to work with and attract new developers and businesses into the area. The Business Improvement District would oversee all aspects of the Plan and work with City and County staff to ensure implementation. The composition of the Business Improvement District must include all stakeholder groups as outlined in the Stakeholder Analysis. Representation from Florida Department of Transportation, City staff, County staff and the business community, as well as local residents will be essential. The Business Improvement District should begin by concentrating on the small aesthetic improvements that will substantially enhance the beauty and perception of the corridor as well as enforcing current codes. This includes historical and identification signs to enhance perception, enhanced landscape and hardscape features at gateway nodes, and adding pedestrian features and amenities along the roadway. The Business Improvement District can also work toward drafting more specific aesthetic guidelines for the corridor and working with City and County staff to implement long term improvements.

Public Efforts

Code Enforcement/Community Safety

Public efforts should begin by building on the momentum of the community planning process to implement real change in the maintenance of the corridor's appearance. By working through the Business Improvement District, the City of Fort Myers and Lee County should enter into an interlocal agreement to address two of the most cited concerns of the community - code enforcement and community safety. Funding can be used from the special assessment district for payment of additional code enforcement and police officers as long as the ordinance that adopts the assessment district contains these purposes.

The current Lee County and Fort Myers building codes do not need to be enhanced as much as the codes need to be enforced. The problems that both Fort Myers and Lee County have with enforcement is that the current number of officers are inadequate and there are too many violations to properly serve many of the communities that most need assistance. Many residents and business owners in the planning area



Picture of overgrown and unmaintained areas.



Existing intersection of Seaboard and Palm Beach Boulevard

complained about the lack of responsiveness of Lee County code enforcement, while residents within the City portion of the planning area agreed that the dedicated code enforcement officer for Ward 1, the Ward that encompasses the incorporated portion of Palm Beach Boulevard, is very responsive, though horribly overworked. It is clear that having a dedicated code enforcement officer for a very manageable and defined area will improve the upkeep of many deteriorating properties. Furthermore, a dedicated enforcement officer for the entire corridor will be assisted by the Ward 1 Code Enforcement Officer making the workload more manageable.

Similarly, a joint community policing effort will help coordination between the City areas and the unincorporated County areas, with the same effect as the code enforcement officer - increased responsiveness and a more manageable task.

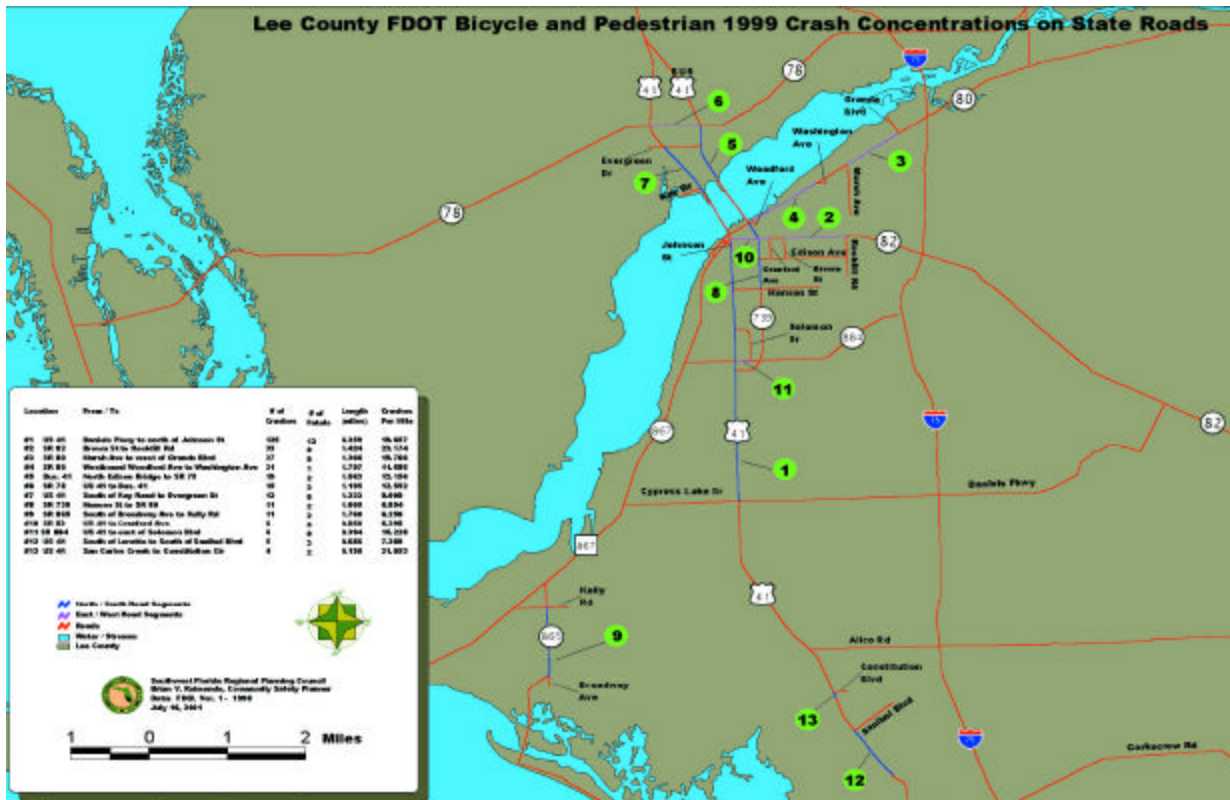
Pedestrian Safety

Due to the close proximity of the residential areas, the commercial businesses along Palm Beach Boulevard attract pedestrian traffic. Despite alarming rates of pedestrian fatalities along Palm Beach Boulevard, pedestrians continue to cross the Boulevard at or near intersections with shopping opportunities. The Bike and Pedestrian Accident Maps that were created based on information obtained by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), demonstrate the severity of the situation (Exhibits 9 and 11). The following map obtained from the MPO shows that in 1999 two sections of Palm Beach Boulevard were ranked third and fourth for the highest concentration of pedestrian and bicycle accidents in Lee County.

The City of Fort Myers and Lee County, in conjunction with the Florida Department of Transportation, must design the roadway and surrounding development to slow down traffic flow along Palm Beach Boulevard and/or make drivers aware of pedestrians through hardscape design and pedestrian amenities. Streetscape pedestrian devices may include "bump outs" at intersections, elevated cross walks, paved cross walks and signage. The City and County should also locate pedestrian amenities such as benches, newspaper stands, trash receptacles and historical informational signage.

The street should be designed for pedestrian convenience. Zoning ordinances should encourage developers to locate buildings closer to the right-of-way to allow for easier access by pedestrians and bus riders. When buildings locate close to the street, roadway corridors achieve a pedestrian scale and a sense that pedestrians also use the roadway, helping to make automobile drivers more cautious and drive slower.

In altering the psychological feel of the street through design or redesign, streetscape elements can be applied in creating a pleasing backdrop of aesthetic features to the boulevard. For example, a welcoming environment can be established through elements consisting of canopy trees that can create an intimate scale to the street. The planting of trees in a straight line combined with an interplay of heights can create interesting focal points along the street. The application of pavers could add texture to the street as well as slow down traffic at important identified nodes of the boulevard.



This map from the MPO identifies two sections along Palm Beach Boulevard within the study area that contain the third and fourth highest concentrations of bike and pedestrian accidents in Lee County

Although many of these changes will happen over the longer term, the Florida Department of Transportation has responded to the high concentration of automobile related accidents by initiating a study to eliminate the center suicide lane and locate medians or landscaped islands along Palm Beach Boulevard. We expect that many business owners along the corridor will object to installing medians because it will limit the number of locations where automobiles can make left-turns into or out of parking areas and driveways. For this reason, Fort Myers and Lee County must conduct an access management study, which includes a substantial conflict resolution component. This report is not the first time medians were proposed along Palm Beach Boulevard. Previous efforts have failed due to competing interests not being able to reconcile the need for public safety and the need for viable commercial development. Moving ahead with the access management study as part of the overall effort of corridor enhancement will help create buy-in with skeptical business owners, and ensuring sufficient access to commercial areas will ensure that installing medians will not hinder the redevelopment effort.



Rendering of Commercial Node with enhanced landscaping, a median, sidewalk, crosswalk pavers, and the buildings located at the roadway to create a pedestrian oriented environment

Boulevard Redevelopment

To enhance pedestrian safety and the aesthetics of the corridor, recreating Palm Beach Boulevard into a true landscaped urban boulevard will be necessary over the next ten years. Redesigning the roadway with landscaped medians or islands will accomplish both of these goals. Increasing pedestrian safety and enhancing the aesthetics of the corridor will significantly improve the perception of Palm Beach Boulevard and lead to an increase in visitors (potential consumers) to the area.

Palm Beach Boulevard widens as it extends west to I-75. We recommend three different landscaped cross-sections that would make the most efficient use of the right-of-way and achieve the goal of a pedestrian oriented, safe and aesthetically enhanced urban boulevard. The Florida Department of Transportation would need to create specific roadway and landscape design plans.

Proposed Boulevard Enhancements



3-Lane Section



5-Lane Section



7-Lane Section

Private Efforts

Image Enhancement

Palm Beach Boulevard should tell a visual story. While walking along, shopping or passing through the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor, visitors should feel that this is a distinct place and get a sense of the history and the specific identity of the community. Image enhancement relates to marketing in that the Business Improvement District should be selling this corridor to visitors, residents and the potential shopping customer base. To do this, the Business Improvement District should coordinate closely with both the Lee County Department of Economic Development and the City of Fort Myers to re-establish the corridor's identity and market the corridor as the entryway into downtown Fort Myers.

Along the corridor itself, signage will help tell the story of Palm Beach Boulevard - both historical and present. Informational signs and kiosks are commonly used to create identity and link information with place. By adding additional pedestrian amenities around a kiosk, such as a bench or other types of seating areas, the sign/kiosk can transform places for visitors to better absorb the information, rather than a sign that people may miss. It is important to provide areas to rest along the corridor with shade trees near the signage creating destination places where people want to gather.

There are several key areas where signage could help relate the history of the corridor. The community building at Terry Park was first used as City Hall for East Fort Myers when the City first incorporated in 1925. Signage that relates the history of this building for visitors to Terry Park would help re-create the identity of this area and enhance the perception of East Fort Myers. Other historic structures or places include the Reilly Brothers store - formerly the Seaboard Airline Railroad Train Depot and the old Citizen's Bank of Fort Myers on the corner of Palm Beach and Superior.

Gateway Features

Enhanced by landscape and hardscape elements, signs can also assist in creating a gateway theme at the entrance into the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor to accentuate the boundaries of the neighborhood. Gateway signs can also be located at the entryways to the individual neighborhoods, similar to what currently exists at Morningside and Morse Shores. Potential gateway features at the western boundary should be located at the Seaboard and Palm Beach Boulevard intersection. The gateway to the east should be at the I-75 and Palm Beach Boulevard interchange. Gateway features can largely be installed by the Business Improvement District, however, more significant treatments, including the round-about, will need to be more in conjunction with the City of Fort Myers and the Florida Department of Transportation.

The gateway at the intersection of Palm Beach Boulevard and Seaboard Street is the most important entryway area along the corridor because it serves the dual purpose of welcoming visitors into historic East Fort Myers and provides the natural and necessary entryway into downtown Fort Myers. Pictured below



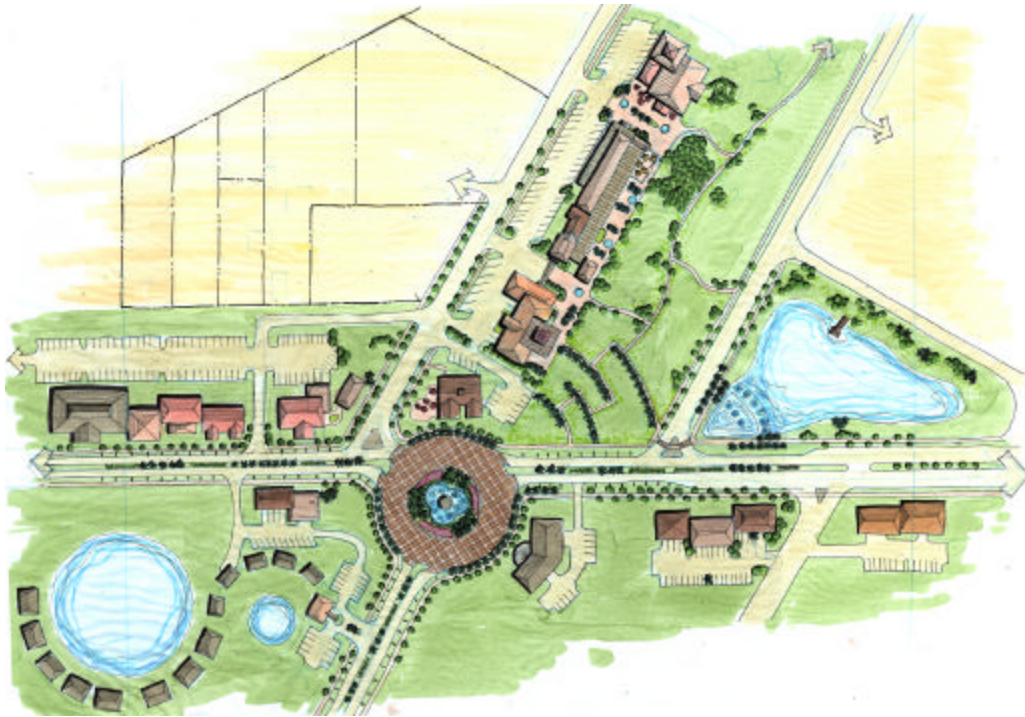
Sign at Patio de Leon narrating the patio's history



Sketch of a kiosk in front of Terry Park, the former site of East Ft. Myers City Hall

is a rendering of a round-about gateway feature, which we recommend for the following three reasons: 1) a round-about can provide a distinct aesthetic gateway feature, unlike other enhancements for gateway features; 2) a round-about will serve the dual purpose of a traffic calming device, necessary given the high density of automobile related accidents in this area; and 3) round-abouts can often be effective in handling awkward intersections.

However, the idea of a round-about needs further study on directional traffic patterns and traffic counts to analyze the capacity of the round-about. The community and the City of Fort Myers will certainly want to avoid using any traffic calming device that causes excessive congestion at this important gateway. However, if that appears to be the case, we still suggest creating a substantial gateway feature with greatly enhanced landscaping, signage and textured paving.



Sketch of a round-about gateway feature at the intersection of Palm Beach Boulevard and Seaboard

Bus Stops

The Lee Tran bus system is a large asset to the community, especially to this community where low-income households rely on the bus system for transportation. The current bus stops are inadequate to provide for the needs of users and detract from the aesthetics of the corridor. Benches should be covered and designed to allow for shade and shelter from rain while providing for enhanced aesthetics along the corridor. Bus stops should post bus routing maps and schedules to educate pedestrians on bus service. Lee Tran may also wish to use bus depots to display information to increase ridership.

Nodal Development

Identifying and concentrating redevelopment efforts on a series of "nodes" or focal points has a few significant advantages. First, Palm Beach Boulevard is 4.5 miles in length. Haphazardly improving areas will not create a noticeable effect. Nodes can help concentrate resources on specific key areas that will have a net benefit to the entire corridor and positively impact the rest of the area. These nodes would typically represent enhanced architectural structures that would be clearly visible from the street. Buildings should be located close to the street to create a pedestrian scale at each node, with retail/offices/mixed use development. Covered bus stops and other potential transit stations should be located at the nodes to increase accessibility.

The creation of nodes and focal points will also concentrate redevelopment in specific areas, allowing for the creation of pedestrian oriented spaces, interconnections, and to mitigate against strip commercial sprawl that currently exists along Palm Beach Boulevard. Further study should be conducted by the Business Improvement District to examine non-functioning and vacant lots outside of the nodes to determine alternative potential uses (i.e. green space, public facilities, parking)

Nodes should generally have higher buildings to make mixed-use buildings economically feasible. Increased building heights, currently allowed by both the Lee Plan and the City of Fort Myers zoning code, should continue to be encouraged to create the density necessary to establish viable mixed-use and pedestrian oriented areas. Nodes can also be developed with unified architectural themes and identities. Along Palm Beach Boulevard, there are several themes that can be explored including the historic node (from Terry Park to Reilly Brothers) - the entryway into the corridor going east and the entryway into historic Fort Myers going west. Other nodes could include mixed-use nodes and a Hispanic cultural themed area.

Commercial

In addition to depicting a welcoming setting to the motorists traveling along Palm Beach Boulevard, the commercial district should also be accessible to the neighborhood districts within the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor. Though buffers are appropriately required to separate distinctly incompatible com-



Existing bus bench



Sketch of proposed covered bus stop



Rendering of Commercial Node Streetscape

commercial areas from the neighborhood districts, there should be adequately placed vehicular and pedestrian links that integrate neighborhood shopping and residential areas. The large shopping centers should provide for pedestrian connections that are designed as safe areas - well lit and separated from traffic, to allow for better integration with the surrounding neighborhoods.

Redevelopment must provide for adequate parking facilities and sidewalks to enhance accessibility to commercial frontage along Palm Beach Boulevard. As lot widths and depths pose a problem in accommodating business expansion plans, zoning ordinances should allow for, and encourage, parking opportunities on rear and side access roads for businesses fronting Palm Beach Boulevard. This option would allow dual frontage considerations for the commercial buildings as well as provide back street access into the commercial districts from the adjacent neighborhoods without having to utilize Palm Beach Boulevard. The Business Improvement District should encourage owners to identify areas for joint parking facilities and amenities along Palm Beach Boulevard that would enhance accessibility to the commercial areas alongside Palm Beach Boulevard. Joint parking facilities allow for retail development to be located closer together and closer to the right-of-way, while still providing for the accessibility necessary for successful retail development. Use of joint parking is necessary to deter the current strip development that exists along Palm Beach Boulevard. Vacant areas behind the commercial lots on the north side of Palm Beach Boulevard and south of the train tracks are ideal locations for joint parking facilities.

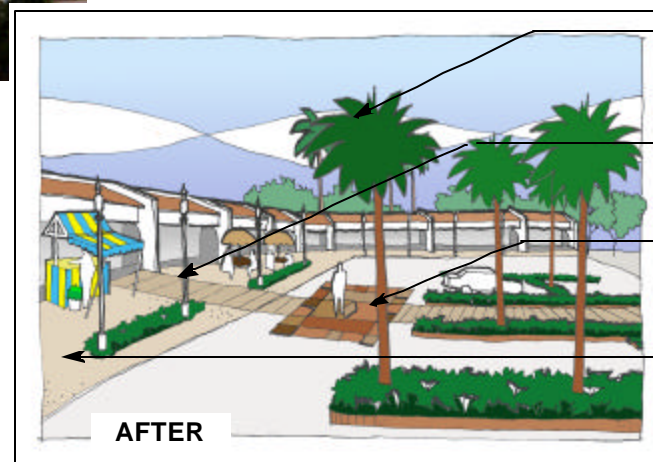
Aesthetic Enhancements

The Business Improvement District should establish a continuous streetscape theme throughout Palm Beach Boulevard corridor, across the City/County border through adopting architectural standards for the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor, encompassing all commercial districts and providing incentives for rehabilitation efforts to vacant and existing commercial establishments. The neighborhood lighting districts should also synchronize the design of neighborhood markers so that they complement one another. Designs do not have to be identical but can be complementary through design, texture and utilization of materials. Small aesthetic enhancements can profoundly affect the perception and character of the neighborhood. The Business Improvement District can work on implementing public enhancements such as landscaping and signage, while also drafting aesthetic guidelines and working with property owners to establish incentives for maintenance of existing properties and façade improvements.



BEFORE

Existing small commercial strip center and conceptual drawing of facade/landscape/parking lot improvements

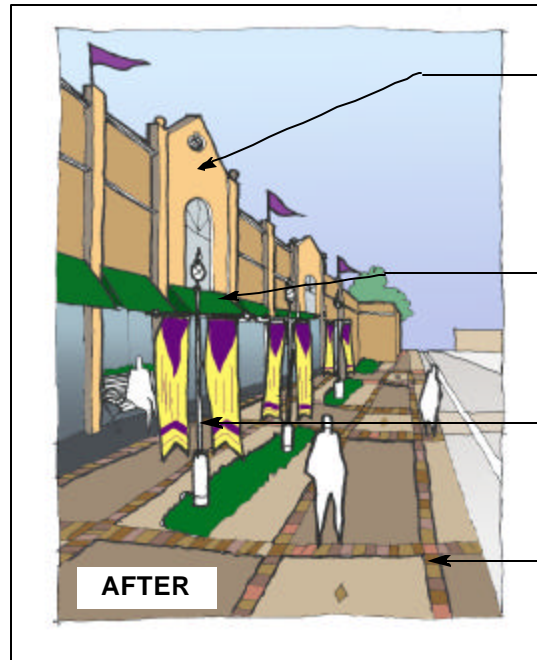


Adequate landscaping to parking area

Communal characteristic street lighting

Pavers for welcoming effect and slowing down traffic

Plaza strip to encourage street front activity



Shopfront rehabilitation

Awnings for color and vernacular treatment

Communal characteristic street lighting and festive banners

Decorative pavers



Shopfront rehabilitation

Decorative pavers for pedestrian crossing and traffic calming

Existing commercial buildings and conceptual drawings of facade/landscape/sidewalk improvements

PHASE II

River

Many participants in the visioning process expressed a desire for improved maintenance, security, enhanced access points and adequate street lighting for existing river access sites such as the Tarpon Street Pier. The residents suggested the need for picnic benches, barbecue pits and lookout points for the delineated recreational areas along the riverfront. The residents also requested that any development located on the waterfront be creatively designed to not obstruct the view of the riverfront.

Redevelopment efforts should encourage public access, providing for sidewalks, picnic areas, benches, barbecue pits, ample parking, adequate street lighting and lookout points for the community. Further study needs to be done to examine riverfront, recreational and open space opportunities.

PHASE III

Rail

The railway tracks bisect the community creating a physical barrier between residential neighborhoods. Where the tracks run parallel to Palm Beach Boulevard, they create a barrier between residential and commercial areas as well. In the neighborhood workshops and the design charrette, residents identified the open space "gaps" between the railway tracks and the commercial areas north of Palm Beach Boulevard as high crime areas.

As the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor redevelops, the need to soften the barrier of railway tracks - connect the residential neighborhoods to commercial areas, will increase. The Business Improvement District can accomplish this through landscape and hardscape features such as greenways and bridges that are part of a linear park. The railway track, due to its linear configuration, has an inherent potential for greenway/walkway development in restoring the backyards of these neighborhoods and reclaiming it to provide integral links between the two districts. The Business Improvement District should work with other organizations such as the Florida Office of Rails to Trails, a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program to identify funding opportunities and project development strategies.

Redevelopment efforts of the railway tracks should substitute the neglected backyard image for a frontage by incorporating greenways and sidewalks adjacent to the railway tracks. The Business Improvement District should identify areas for crossings to provide integral links between the neighborhood districts and the commercial districts. Cleaning up the tracks will enhance current conditions and allow potential communal uses for these areas.

Links to Other Areas - Estero, Bonita Springs, Naples and Charlotte County

The Business Improvement District, Lee County, and the City of Fort Myers should coordinate efforts with the Seminole Gulf Railway to revitalize and enhance utilization of the railway tracks. One option is to provide transit services via rail for residents and tourists between the City of Fort Myers south to Estero, Bonita Springs and Naples. This was an idea that Estero residents identified in their community visioning sessions as part of the Estero Community Plan. Providing transit from South Lee County or even Naples to the City of Fort Myers would create a substantial benefit for businesses located both along this corridor and in downtown Fort Myers.

There is a multitude of planning studies and cases that suggest that locating light and commuter rail stations substantially increases the value of nearby residential and commercial areas. The City of Fort Myers, in conjunction with Lee County, should conduct a market analysis to further study this possibility and the effects on land values, attracting new businesses to Palm Beach Boulevard, development patterns of areas along the rail line, and the effects of mitigating against sprawl. If a transit station were located along Palm Beach Boulevard connecting the corridor to downtown, South Lee and potentially Naples, this area would become a major commercial node for the corridor.

A Note on Crime Prevention

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a very valuable tool for redevelopment in high crime areas. Crime was one of the central concerns of residents and business owners who stressed that any redevelopment must not contribute to, or in any way exacerbate the crime problem. Specifically, residents were concerned with the creation of new open space or park areas, benches that could be used for sleeping facilities, and parks that could be used for illicit activities including prostitution and substance abuse. CPTED principals for the design of public spaces, facilities, sidewalks and roadways are proven effective and should be carefully followed in the implementation of any facilities. Although CPTED designs can often lessen aesthetic enhancement, a further increase in crime or a continuation of the current crime rate would inhibit the redevelopment of the corridor and the enhancement of the identity of Palm Beach Boulevard.

V Implementation Options: Financing and Regulations

FINANCE OPTIONS

There are various financing options available for implementation of the plan. The following are several of the most common funding mechanisms available. There are other sources of financing through FDOT and Florida State administered grants, bonds, public/private partnerships, and guaranteed loans. The Business Improvement District should work closely with City and County staff to identify funding sources as they move through the implementation process.

Any option for implementation of a redevelopment plan for the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor will require coordination across the political boundaries of unincorporated Lee County and the City of Fort Myers. An inter-local agreement will most likely be needed to delineate the responsibilities and the process of coordination.

Special Assessment Districts

The term Special Assessment Districts (SAD) describes a method of financing public improvements by distributing the cost of the improvements to those property owners who will directly benefit. SAD may be initiated either through a resolution by City Council or at the request of a property owner whose property would be included in the district to be assessed.

The types of local public improvements that are typically paid by Special Assessment Districts include landscaping, sanitary sewers, storm drains, water mains, road paving, dust control, sidewalk construction and street lighting. However, Special Assessment Districts can fund almost any improvement directed by the assessed property owners, and can fund the costs of an organization created to oversee these improvements. Currently, the study area has three separate special assessment districts that have a mandate to address only street lights and landscaping. A Business Improvement District is a type of Special Assessment District, where the business owners along a specific corridor or in a specific area are assessed for improvements to the businesses.

SAD costs include the cost of services, plans, condemnation, spreading of rolls, notices, advertising, financing, construction and legal fees, as well as all other costs incident to the making of the proposed improvement. It is the City Assessor's responsibility to determine the most equitable method of cost distribution for any given project.

There are two basic methods for distributing the project costs, the Unit Cost Method and the Front Foot Method. The Unit Cost Method is an option whereby each property is assessed an equal share of the proj-

ect cost. The Front Foot Method requires that any specific property owner's share of the project be based on the number of feet of road frontage or side yard exposure to the right of way. An example of this cost distribution method would be a sidewalk project where the cost is distributed proportionately among those who would directly benefit from the improvements. Special Assessments for continuing services such as street lighting differ from the norm as it involves both construction and ongoing costs for services rendered. Assessment for this type of service is continued until such service is removed.

For Lee County, The Municipal Services Taxing/Benefit Units (MSTBU) assists citizens in the unincorporated areas of Lee County to organize and create special improvement units for obtaining specific services which are beyond the core level of services provided by the County. For this purpose, two types of services are provided - Capital Projects and Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Projects. Capital Projects would include such projects as road paving and drainage, canal/channel dredging, building sidewalks and others. O&M projects would typically include street lighting, landscaping, security patrols, beautification and others.

In creating a SAD District, the Palm Beach Boulevard Community would have to delineate the boundaries and match it to the required scope of services. Creation of a Special Assessment District, or alteration in the current scope of an existing district, requires agreement of 50% +1 of the property owners, or can be done by special ordinance. Because there is currently no organizational structure that will work with property owners to implement this plan, creating a Special Assessment District with the broad scope of public improvements and plan implementation is the first step in this plan.

Florida Main Street

The Florida Main Street Program is based out of the Division of Historic Resources in the Department of State and provides technical assistance to organizations or cities engaged in revitalization of downtown and commercial districts. The Florida Main Street Program would be an excellent option for the Business Improvement District in obtaining the necessary resources to identify short and long term funding options and initiate programs for redevelopment along the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor. The Business Improvement District would need to hire a full time staff person to oversee redevelopment efforts in order to be eligible for the Main Street program, but hiring a staff person to ensure that redevelopment efforts are continuous is an important step to ensure plan implementation.

The following are the three main criteria to apply to be part of the Florida Main Street Program:

1. The District and Community - Extent to which the proposed Local Program Area as a significant group of historic resources in a compact, cohesive, pedestrian-oriented area - downtown or neighborhood commercial district.

2. Community Understanding of and Commitment to the Main Street Approach - Demonstrated understanding of Main Street Approach and Principles
3. Organizational Readiness and Financial Strength - Adequate budget and support: full time, paid Program Manager

The entire area of this planning study would probably not be eligible for the Florida Main Street program. Generally, eligible districts must be walkable - usually no more than a mile in length. The other limitation may be that the City of Fort Myers already has a Florida Main Street designation and would need to show a commitment for long term funding for both programs.

Home Ownership Resource Center (HORC)

The Business Improvement District should work with organizations like the Home Ownership Resource Center, a new 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in East Lee County. The Home Ownership Resource Center's mission is to provide technical assistance to prospective residents in search of affordable housing opportunities and to revitalize the existing housing stock in the neighborhoods along Palm Beach Boulevard. The Home Ownership Resource Center provides advice and homeowner counseling on different types of loan and mortgage programs. The Business Improvement District can also work with HORC on joint marketing and image revitalization campaigns.

Tax Increment Financing

In financing development or redevelopment, issuing bonds are a common source of funds secured either by projected tax income, revenues from a specific project, lease payments or other sources. For redevelopment areas, the most common tool is tax increment financing. Under this option, a local government must create a Community Redevelopment Area and a Redevelopment Board, generally selected from stakeholder groups within the redevelopment area. At the creation of the bond, a "base year" is set to assess property values, and the bond is secured based on the increment of property tax levy increase over the base year assessed value of properties within the redevelopment area.

The negative aspects of this are that it can unduly hamper the financial flexibility of a municipality if it has too many areas where tax dollars are earmarked for specific locations. It is often difficult to accurately assess the increase in value directly related to any specific improvement funding by the bond. Therefore the municipality has the inherent risks of 1) committing to channeling monies to a specific area over a long period of time, and 2) only a minimal increase in property values that will not be sufficient to fund real improvements.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) provides eligible metropolitan cities and urban counties (called "entitlement communities") with annual direct grants that may be used to revitalize neighborhoods, expand affordable housing and economic opportunities, and/or improve community facilities and services principally to benefit low to moderate income persons. Since 1974, CDBG has been the backbone of improvement efforts in many communities, providing a flexible source of annual grant funds for local governments nationwide - funds that they, with the participation of local citizens, may devote to the activities that best serve their own particular development priorities. Funding criteria requires that projects either i) benefit low to moderate income persons, ii) prevent or eliminate slums or blight; or iii) meet other urgent community development needs. The impact of CDBG funded projects can be seen in the housing stock, the business environment, the streets and the public facilities. Although rehabilitation of affordable housing has traditionally been the largest single use of CDBG funds, the program is also an increasingly important catalyst for economic development activities that expand job and business opportunities for lower income persons and neighborhoods.

Grantees may use CDBG funds for activities that include (but are not limited to):

- Acquiring real property (land, buildings and other permanent improvements to the property)
- Reconstructing or rehabilitating housing and other property
- Building public facilities and improvements, such as streets, sidewalks, sewers, water systems, community and senior citizen centers and recreational facilities
- Assisting for-profit businesses for special economic development activities and job creation/ retention activities
- Providing public services for youths, seniors, or the disabled
- Carrying out crime reduction initiatives such as establishing neighborhood watch programs, providing extra police patrols, rehabilitating or constructing police substations, and clearing abandoned buildings used for illegal activities
- Assisting low income homebuyers directly through, for example, down payment assistance, subsidizing interest rates or helping with closing costs for first time buyers
- Enforcing local building codes to reverse housing deterioration and other signs of blight, and
- Paying for planning and administrative expenses, such as costs related for developing a Consolidated Plan and managing CDBG funds.

There are two CDBG programs administered through the Florida Department of Community Affairs that would work for the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor- the Florida Small Cities Program and the Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program. However, based on municipal size requirements, only the portions within the City of Fort Myers would be eligible for funding from the Florida Small Cities Program.

VI Comprehensive Plan/Development Code Analysis

Lee County Comprehensive Plan

In order to achieve the community's vision for the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor, there are only a few changes to the current text of the Lee Plan that are necessary.

The Future Land Use Map for Lee County designates Palm Beach Boulevard in the Intensive Development land use category, and the residential areas are largely in the Suburban Land Use Category, while the areas along Tice Street are in a mix of Central Urban, Suburban and Intensive development categories.

Given the community's vision for higher intensity mixed use developments at particular nodes, the Intensive Development land use category works for Palm Beach Boulevard. Intensive Development allows for a mix of uses including commercial, higher density residential (7-14 du/acre) and specifically refers to planned mixed-use center as appropriate in this land use category.

Committee members have suggested a land use change from Intensive Development to Central Urban with the intent of eliminating billboards as a potential use for this corridor. In our analysis, a land use change would do the following:

- Lower the allowable residential density.
- Shift the emphasis in the language away from higher intensity mixed use developments towards high intensity commercial development. Functionally, this does not make a difference as far as potential allowable development entitlements.
- Prohibit billboards.

We do not feel it is necessary to make a land use change. We suggest changing the Lee County Land Development Code to address billboards along this corridor. Changing the land use category may inhibit a future mixed use redevelopment project that requires higher residential densities to make the project financially feasible.

From our discussion with the community, the only amendment to the Future Land Use Map that may be necessary is in the Suburban Land Use category along Tice Street. Residents who live along Tice Street favored development of commerce park uses similar to the developments south of Tice Street. The Suburban land use category does not allow industrial uses and larger commercial developments. Therefore, we suggest extending the Central Urban land use category over the lands currently designat-

ed as Suburban, south of Palm Beach Boulevard and north of Tice Street.

The Community Planning Panel has the option of drafting a text addition to the Lee County Comprehensive Plan. This would be adopted as a new Goal in the plan, followed by general Objectives and Policies. We have drafted suggested language, contained as Appendix A.

City of Fort Myers Comprehensive Plan

The Fort Myers Comprehensive Plan anticipated a corridor study or redevelopment plan for Palm Beach Boulevard. The only actions necessary with regard to the comprehensive plan are to:

1. Adopt the vision as set forth in this planning study.
2. Conduct and implement the necessary additional plans/studies (access management, economic analysis, etc.)
3. Amend the language in Objective 5 of the Comprehensive Plan with regard to Palm Beach Boulevard.

Land Development Codes

Palm Beach Boulevard, as a State Road and a major arterial gateway into downtown Fort Myers, was designed to speed traffic through the corridor to and from downtown and I-75. However, given the demographics and the proximity of residential areas to neighborhood shopping areas, pedestrian traffic is a reality. It is necessary, and is the vision of this community, to create a pedestrian safe and friendly street with a moderate flow of traffic. As discussed, the City and County can accomplish this through concentrating commercial development at specific mixed-use "village type" nodes. To make the village nodes possible, certain land development ordinances that currently inhibit this type of development must change.

Land Development Code Revisions

The City of Fort Myers is currently revising the zoning code to incorporate the suggestions of the downtown redevelopment plan. As part of the downtown redevelopment plan, Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company (DPZ) licensed their Smart Code to the City of Fort Myers. This code would effectively remove the barriers to redevelopment of mixed-use village nodes and a pedestrian friendly corridor that currently exist in zoning codes for both the city and the county. When looking at applying this code to the Palm Beach Boulevard corridor, it is important to note that the nodes identified in this plan would be defined in the DPZ Smart Code as "Urban Center". The remaining areas would be defined as "General Urban". DPZ's "Urban

Center" classification for the mixed-use nodes is essential to create the intensity of development currently allowed in the City and the County and necessary for a financially feasible mixed-use project. Some of the most important elements of the DPZ Smart Code that the City and County need to address to make mixed-use nodes and a pedestrian friendly corridor a reality are: maximum front and side setbacks (not minimum setbacks) to pull buildings closer together and closer to the right-of-way, design and location of parking lots and signage standards.

To address the issue of billboards currently allowed along Palm Beach Boulevard, Lee County Land Development Code Section 30-183(b) should be changed to include Palm Beach Boulevard (outside interchange areas) as an area where billboards are not allowed.

In accordance with the proposed comprehensive plan amendment, Lee County should coordinate with the City of Fort Myers in amending the Land Development Code to provide visual continuity throughout the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor, across the City/County border. Specifically, Lee County should amend LDC Section 34-2192 to require buildings to be located close to the right-of-way at the identified nodes.

APPENDIX A - PLANNING AREA



LEGEND

- FORT MYERS CITY LIMITS
- COMMUNITY PLAN BOUNDARY
- ZONE 1
- ZONE 2
- ZONE 3
- GATEWAY
- NODES



Vanasse Daylor

12730 New Brittany Boulevard, Suite 600
 Fort Myers, FL 33907
 v 239.437.4601 f 239.437.4636
 3001 Tamiami Trail North, Suite 206
 Naples, FL 34103
 v 239.403.0223 f 239.263.5096
 w vanday.com

PROJECT & SHEET TITLE:
PALM BEACH BLVD. COMMUNITY PLAN
GATEWAY-NODES-ZONES
APPENDIX - A

PREPARED FOR:
 PALM BEACH BOULEVARD
 COMMUNITY PLANNING PANNEL

PROJECT LOCATION:
 PALM BEACH BOULEVARD

NOTE:
 The information shown on these plans is subject to change. It is the participant's responsibility to verify all information prior to commencement of planning, engineering, and/or construction.

SCALE: 1" = 1600'

DATE: SEP 09-09-02

CHECKED: DBO 09-09-02

APPROVED: DBO 09-09-02

| NO. | DATE | BY: | REVISION: |
|-----|------|-----|-----------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

PROJECT NO: 80421.04
ACAD NO: 80421-AER4
APPENDIX - A

APPENDIX B - SUGGESTED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN LANGUAGE

“The Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor ”

GOAL 21: THE PALM BEACH BOULEVARD CORRIDOR

To redevelop the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor into a vibrant commercial and residential neighborhood with mixed-use nodes, enhanced landscaping, pedestrian facilities, transit service and recreational areas; and to recapture the historic identity of the area through signage and public facilities. This Goal and subsequent objectives and policies apply to The Palm Beach Boulevard boundaries as depicted on Map 16.

Objective 21.1: COMMUNITY CHARACTER. The Palm Beach Boulevard community will draft and submit regulations, policies and discretionary actions affecting the character and aesthetic appearance of the corridor for Lee County to adopt and enforce to help create a visually attractive community.

Policy 21.1.1: By the end of 2004, The Palm Beach Boulevard community will draft and submit regulations, policies for Lee County to review, amend or establish as Land Development Code regulations that provide for enhanced landscaping along roadway corridors, greater buffering and shading of parking areas, signage and lighting consistent with the Community Vision and architectural standards.

Policy 21.1.2: Lee County is discouraged from approving any deviation that would result in a reduction of landscaping, buffering, signage guidelines or compliance with architectural standards.

Objective 21.2: COMMERCIAL LAND USES. Existing and future county regulations, land use interpretations, policies, zoning approvals, and administrative actions must recognize the unique conditions and preferences of the Palm Beach Boulevard Community to ensure that commercial areas maintain a unified and pleasing aesthetic/visual quality in landscaping, architecture, lighting and signage, provide for employment opportunities, while discouraging uses that are not compatible with adjacent uses and have significant adverse impacts on natural resources.

Policy 21.2.1: By the end of 2004 the Palm Beach Boulevard Community will submit regulations that encourage mixed use developments for Lee County to review, amend or adopt.

Policy 21.2.2: Lee County encourages commercial developments within the Palm Beach Boulevard Community to provide interconnect opportunities with adjacent commercial uses in order to minimize access points onto primary road corridors; and residential developments to provide interconnect opportunities with commercial areas, including but not limited to bike paths and pedestrian access ways.

Objective 21.3: RESIDENTIAL USES: Lee County must protect and enhance the residential character of the Palm Beach Boulevard Community by strictly evaluating adjacent uses, natural resources, access and recreational or open space, and requiring compliance with enhanced buffering requirements.

Policy 21.3.1: By the end of 2002, the Palm Beach Boulevard community will draft and submit regulations and policies for Lee County to review, amend or adopt as regulations in the Land Development Code to provide for greater buffering between distinctly different adjacent commercial and residential properties, modified however when a project is of mixed use nature.

Policy 21.3.2: Mixed Use developments that provide for an integration of commercial with residential uses with pedestrian linkages are encouraged. By the end of 2004, the Palm Beach Boulevard community will draft and submit regulations and policies for Lee County to review, amend or establish as Land Development Code regulations that encourage mixed-use developments.

Objective 21.4: INTERLOCAL COOPERATION. Lee County will coordinate activities and work with the City of Fort Myers to create a cohesive program for redevelopment along the corridor from Billy's Creek to I-75.

Policy 21.4.1: Lee County will work with the City of Fort Myers and the Florida Department of Transportation and enter into interlocal agreements where necessary to promote a unified redevelopment program for Palm Beach Boulevard.

Policy 21.4.2: Lee County will work with the City of Fort Myers, the Florida Department of Transportation, the residents and local businesses to create an oversight board to guide the redevelopment of the Palm Beach Boulevard Corridor. Lee County will work with the oversight board to find and apply for funding for redevelopment activities.

Policy 21.4.3: Lee County will coordinate with the City of Fort Myers and the Florida Department of Transportation to conduct an access management study along Palm Beach Boulevard, prepare a streetscape plan, and coordinate a market analysis for the effect of rail transit on this corridor and in other areas of Lee County where the tracks are currently in use.

Objective 21.5: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION. Lee County will encourage and solicit public input and participation prior to and during the review and adoption of county regulations, Land Development Code provisions, Lee Plan provisions, and zoning approvals.

Policy 21.5.1: As a courtesy, Lee County will register citizen groups and civic organizations within the Palm Beach Boulevard Planning Community that desire notification of pending review of Land Development Code amendments and Lee Plan amendments. Upon registration, Lee County will provide registered groups with documentation regarding these pending amendments. This notice is a courtesy only and is not jurisdictional. Accordingly, the County's failure to mail or to timely mail the notice, or failure of a group to receive mailed notice, will not constitute a defect in notice or bar a public hearing from occurring as scheduled.

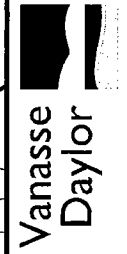
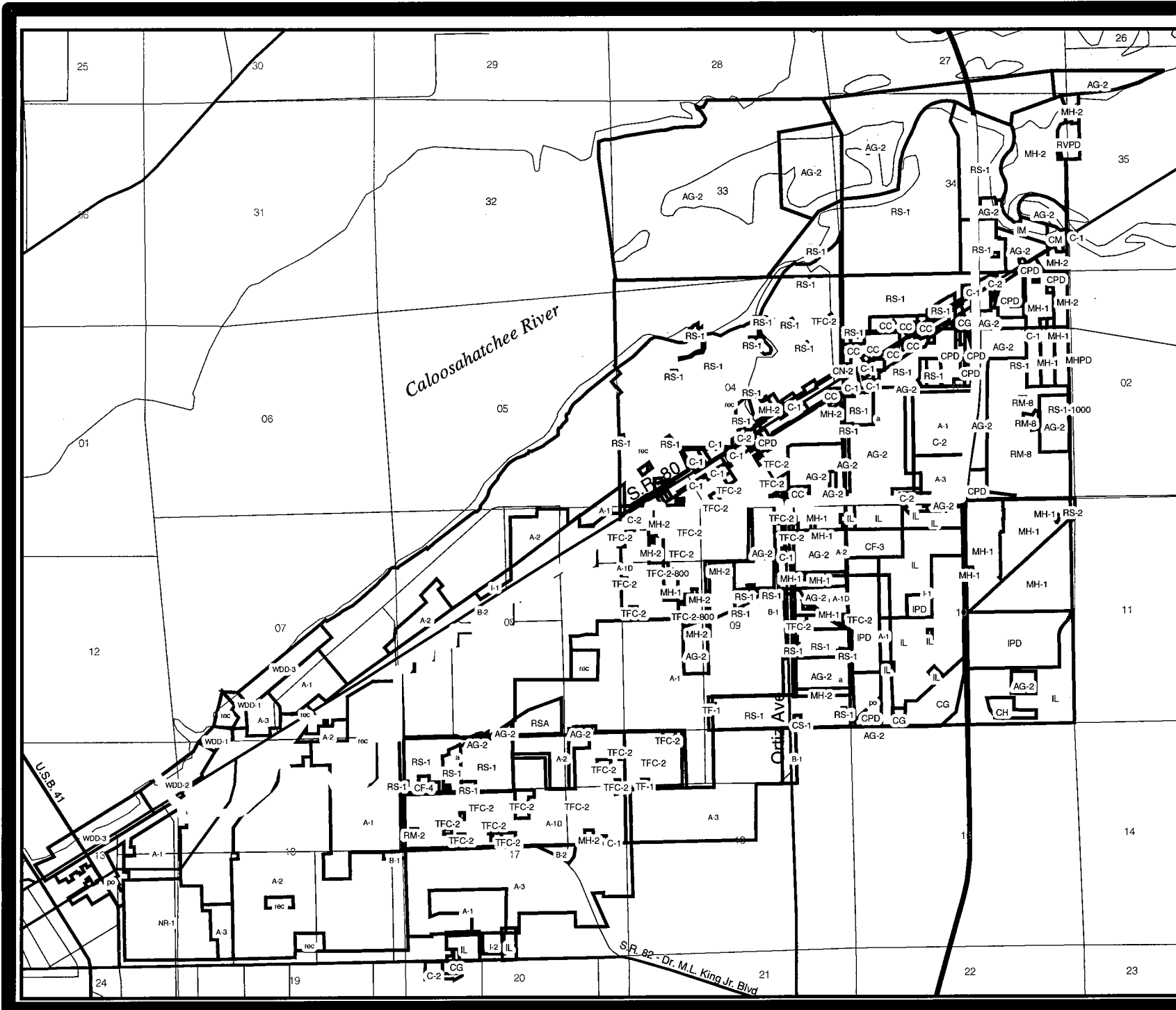
Objective 21.6: COMMUNITY FACILITIES. Lee County will work with the Palm Beach Boulevard Community to provide or facilitate the provision of a broad mix of Community Facilities.

Policy 21.6.1: Lee County will work with the Palm Beach Boulevard Community, the State of Florida and the SEC Railroad to create a linear park along the railroad and pedestrian linkages across the tracks in order to better integrate the residential and commercial areas with the railway.

Policy 21.6.2: Bikeways and pedestrian ways along collector or arterial roads must be separated from the edge of pavement by a minimum 4 foot planting strip.

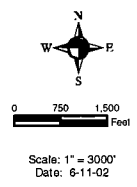
Policy 21.6.3: Lee County will work with the residents of the Russell Park community to preserve the existing linear waterfront park by vacating the excess right-of-way along the river and dedicating it to the adjacent property owners as a pedestrian easement, and work with the residents to explore maintenance issues associated with the public boat ramp.

APPENDIX C - DATA AND ANALYSIS MAPS

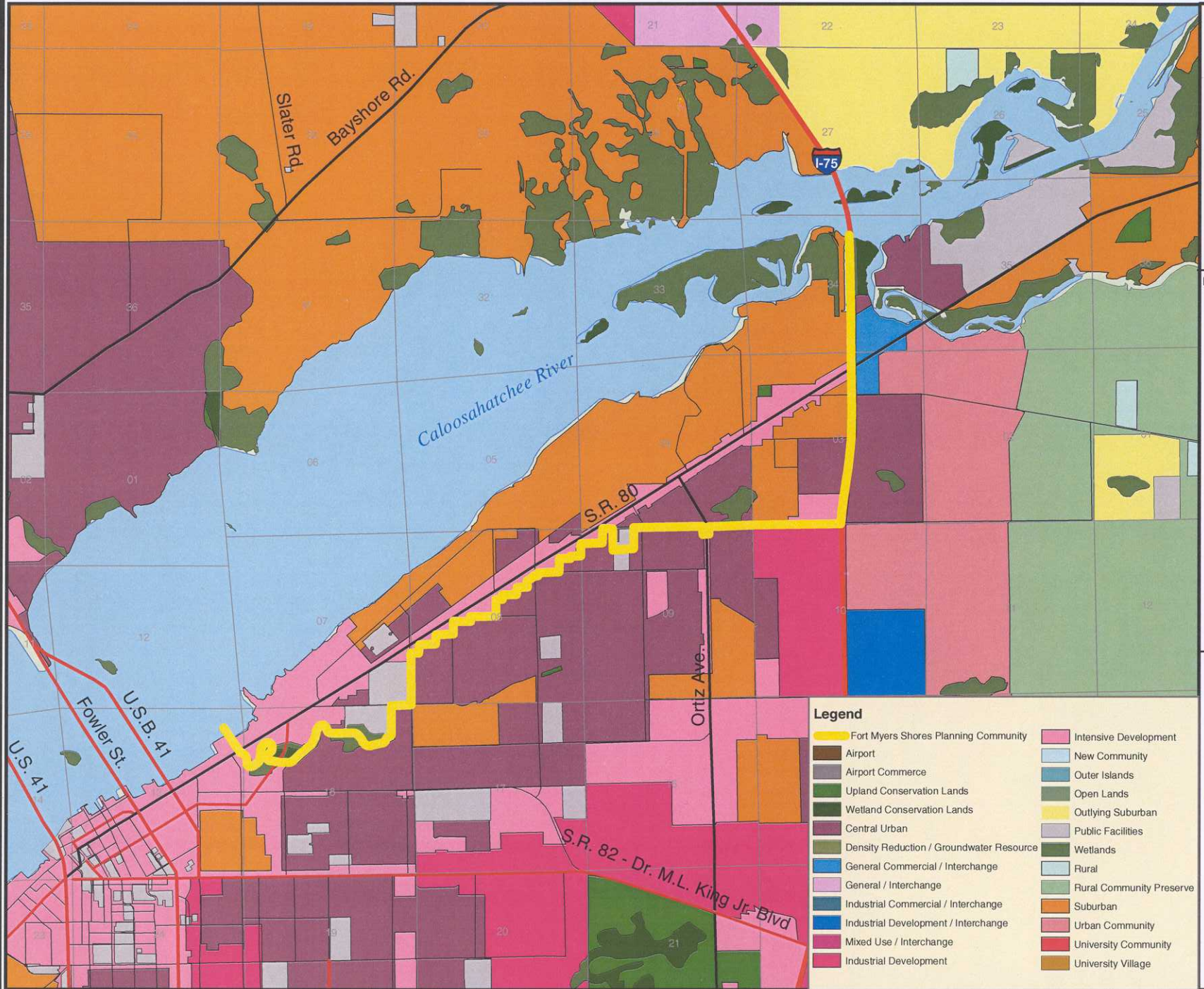


Sources: Lee County Property Appraiser
It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained herein.

Legend
 Zoning

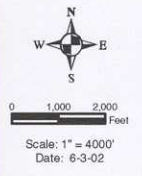


Palm Beach Community Plan
Existing Zoning Map
Exhibit I



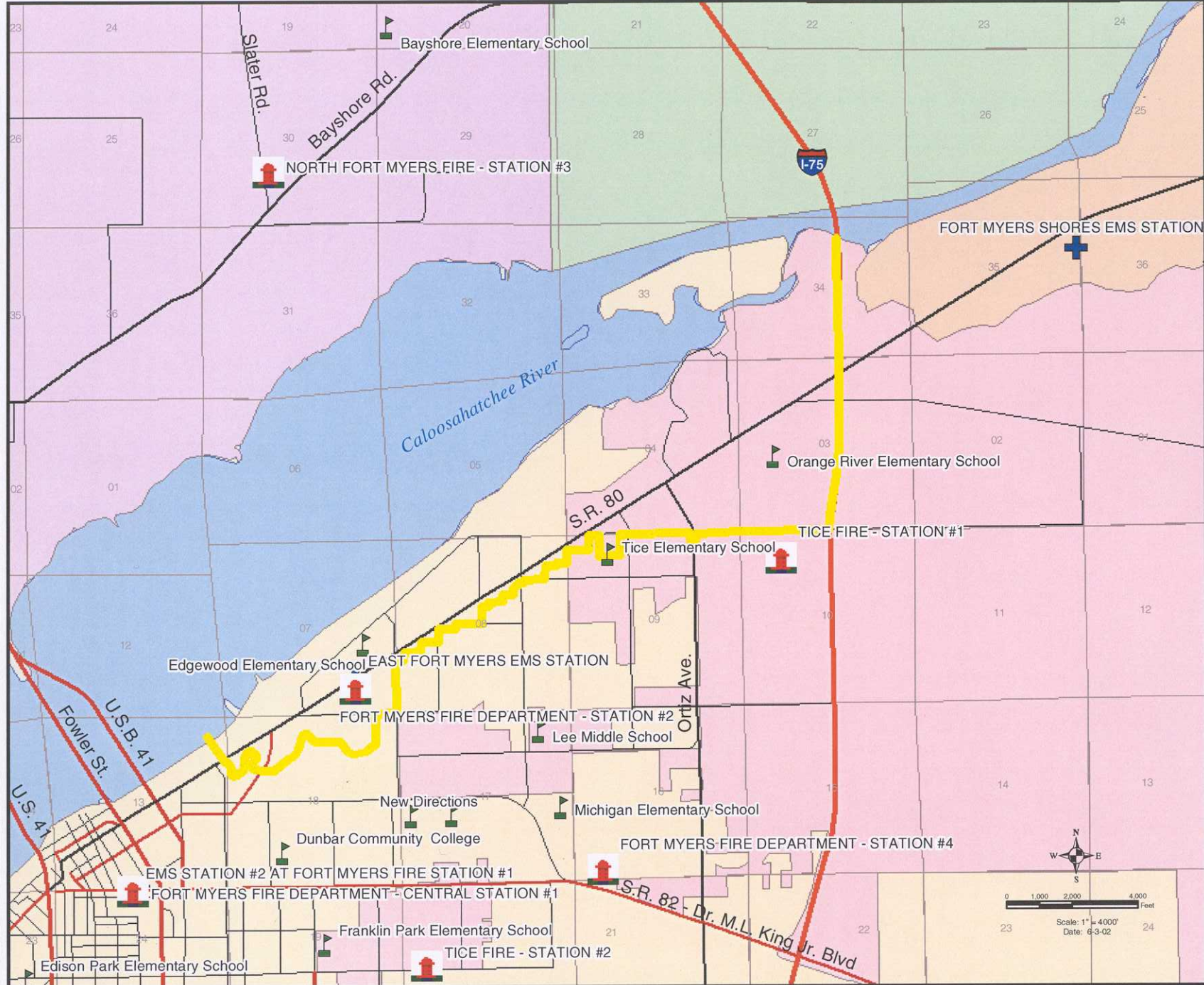
Sources: Lee County Property Appraiser
It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained herein.

LEGEND:



| Legend | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Fort Myers Shores Planning Community | Intensive Development |
| Airport | New Community |
| Airport Commerce | Outer Islands |
| Upland Conservation Lands | Open Lands |
| Wetland Conservation Lands | Outlying Suburban |
| Central Urban | Public Facilities |
| Density Reduction / Groundwater Resource | Wetlands |
| General Commercial / Interchange | Rural |
| General / Interchange | Rural Community Preserve |
| Industrial Commercial / Interchange | Suburban |
| Industrial Development / Interchange | Urban Community |
| Mixed Use / Interchange | University Community |
| Industrial Development | University Village |

Palm Beach Community Plan
Future Land Use Map
Exhibit II



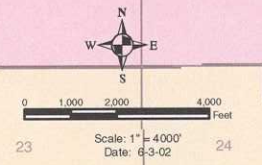
Legend

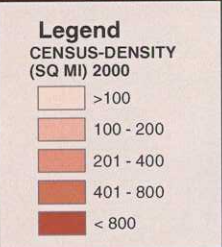
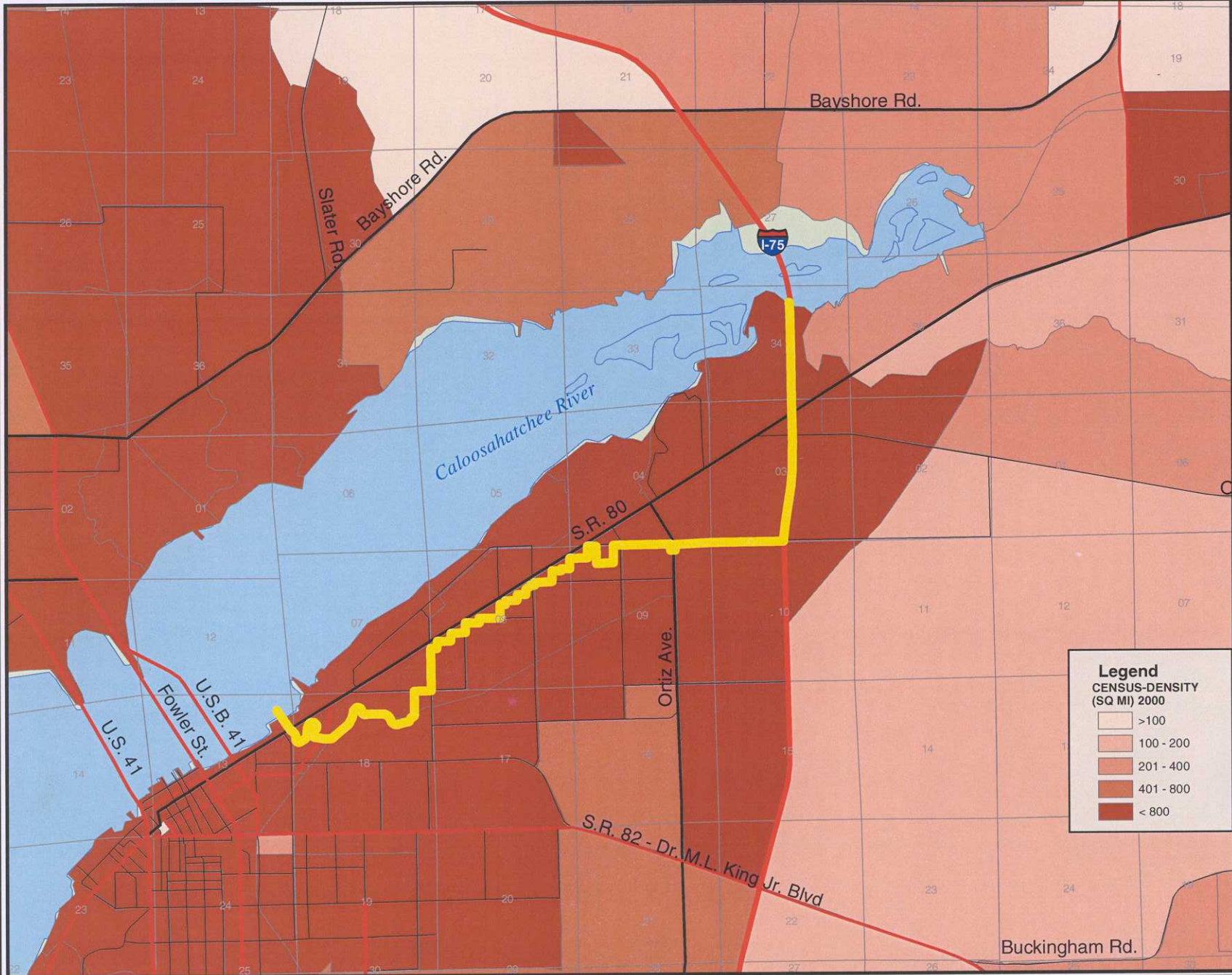
-  Schools
-  Fire Stations
-  EMS Stations

Fire Districts

-  Bayshore
-  Fort Myers
-  Fort Myers Shores
-  North Fort Myers
-  Tice

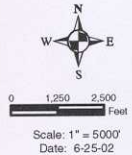
Palm Beach Community Plan
Fire, EMS, and School Locations
Exhibit III



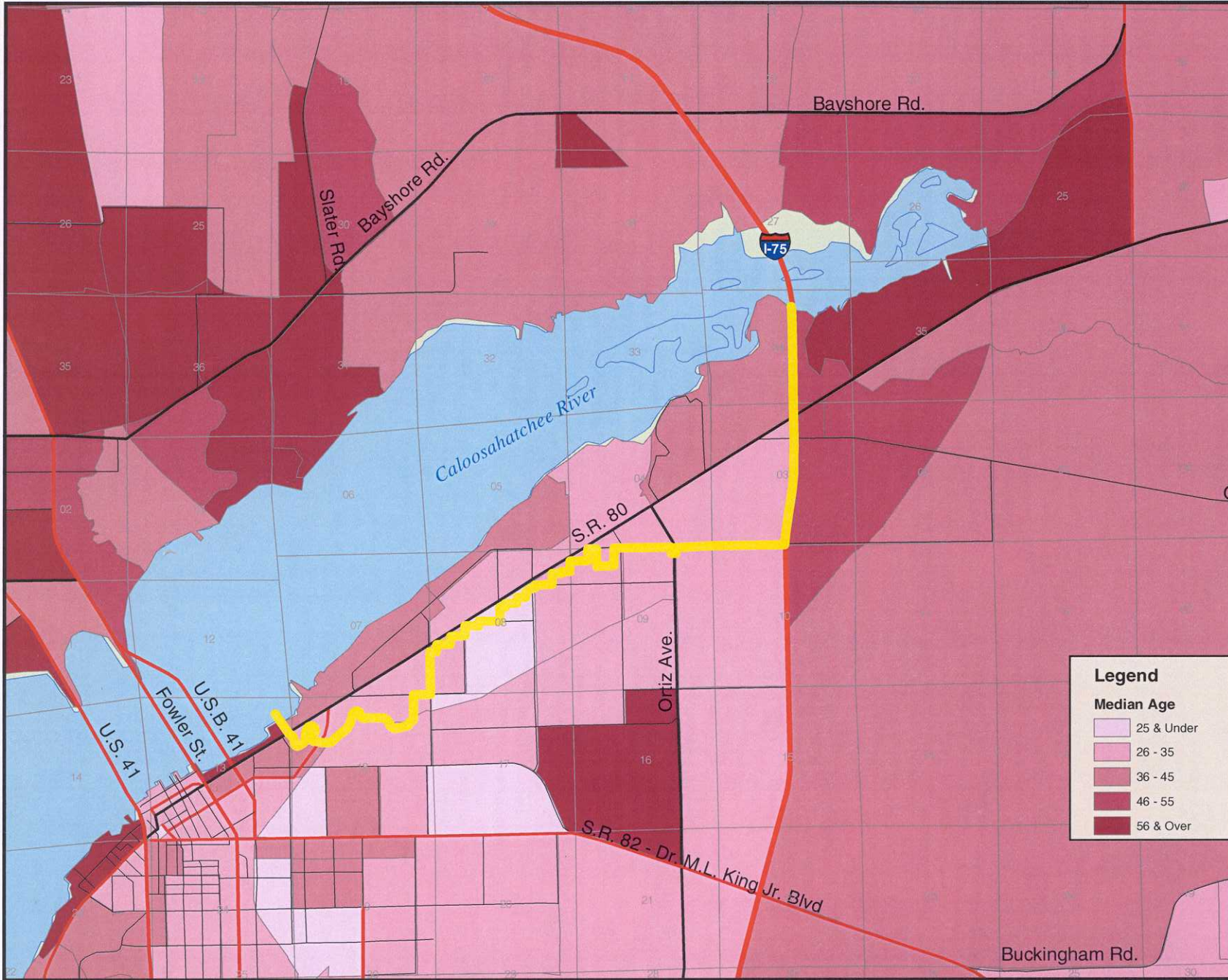


Source: Lee County Property Appraiser & ESRI
 It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained hereon.

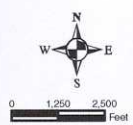
LEGEND:



Palm Beach Community Plan
 Population Density
 Exhibit IV
 Census 2000



LEGEND:



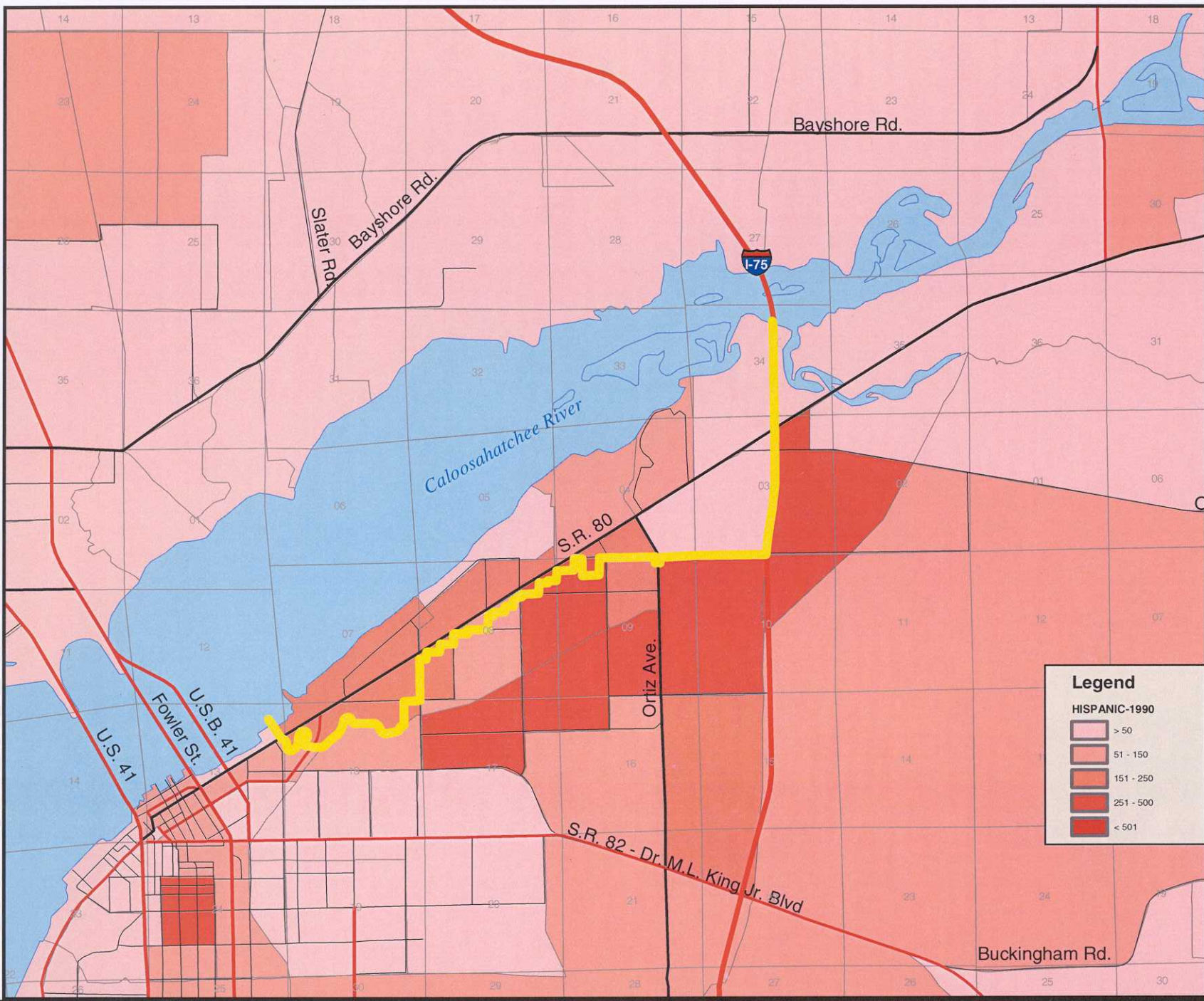
Scale: 1" = 5000'
 Date: 6-25-02

Legend

Median Age

- 25 & Under
- 26 - 35
- 36 - 45
- 46 - 55
- 56 & Over

Palm Beach Community Plan
 Median Age
 Exhibit V
 Census 2000



Sources: Lee County Property Appraiser & ESRI
 It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained herein.

LEGEND:

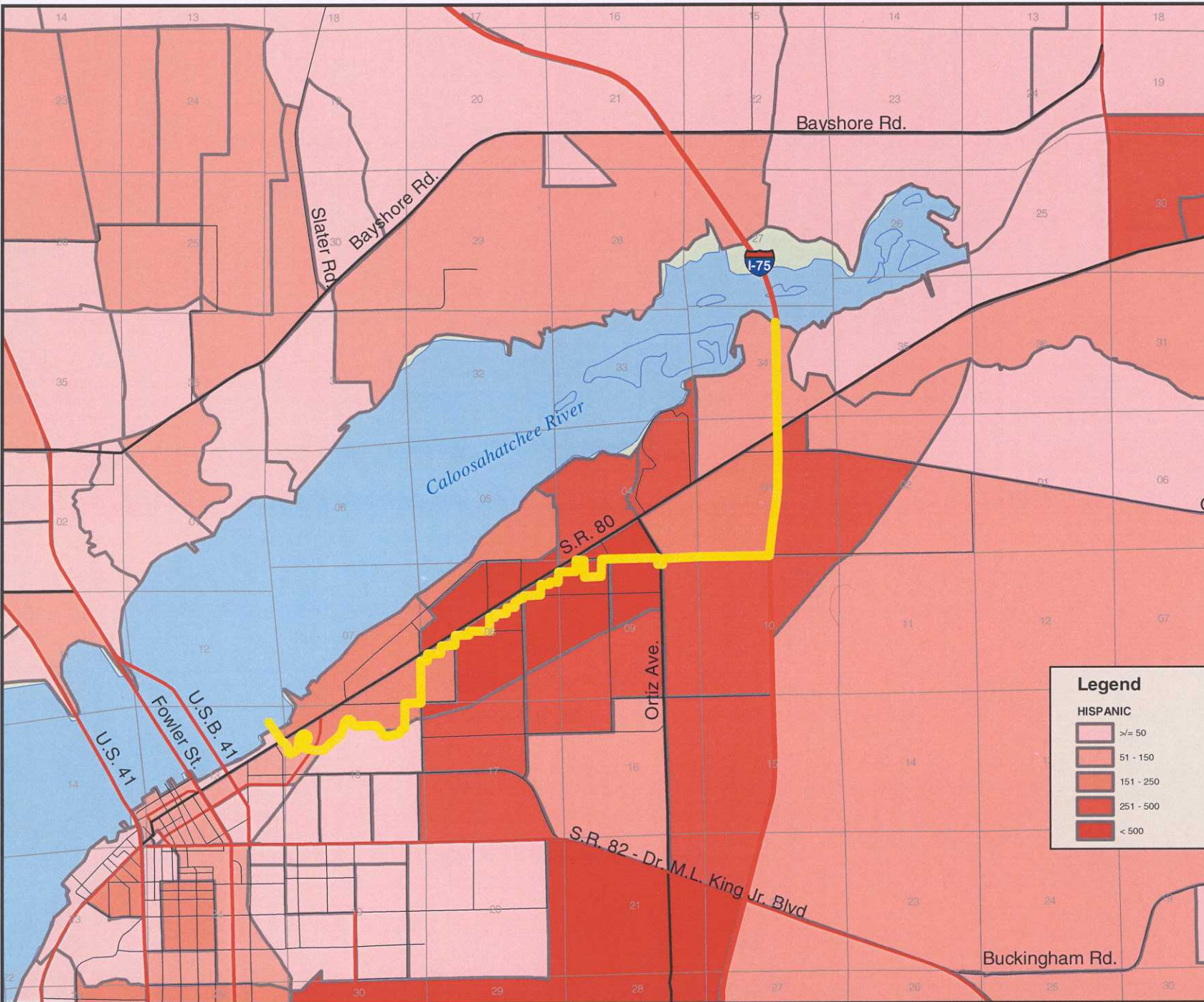
| Legend | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| HISPANIC-1990 | |
| [Light Pink Box] | > 50 |
| [Medium Pink Box] | 51 - 150 |
| [Light Red Box] | 151 - 250 |
| [Dark Red Box] | 251 - 500 |
| [Very Dark Red Box] | < 501 |

Palm Beach Community Plan
 Demographics - Hispanic Population
 Exhibit VI
 Census 1990



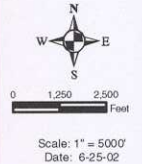
0 1,250 2,500
 Feet

Scale: 1" = 5000'
 Date: 6-25-02



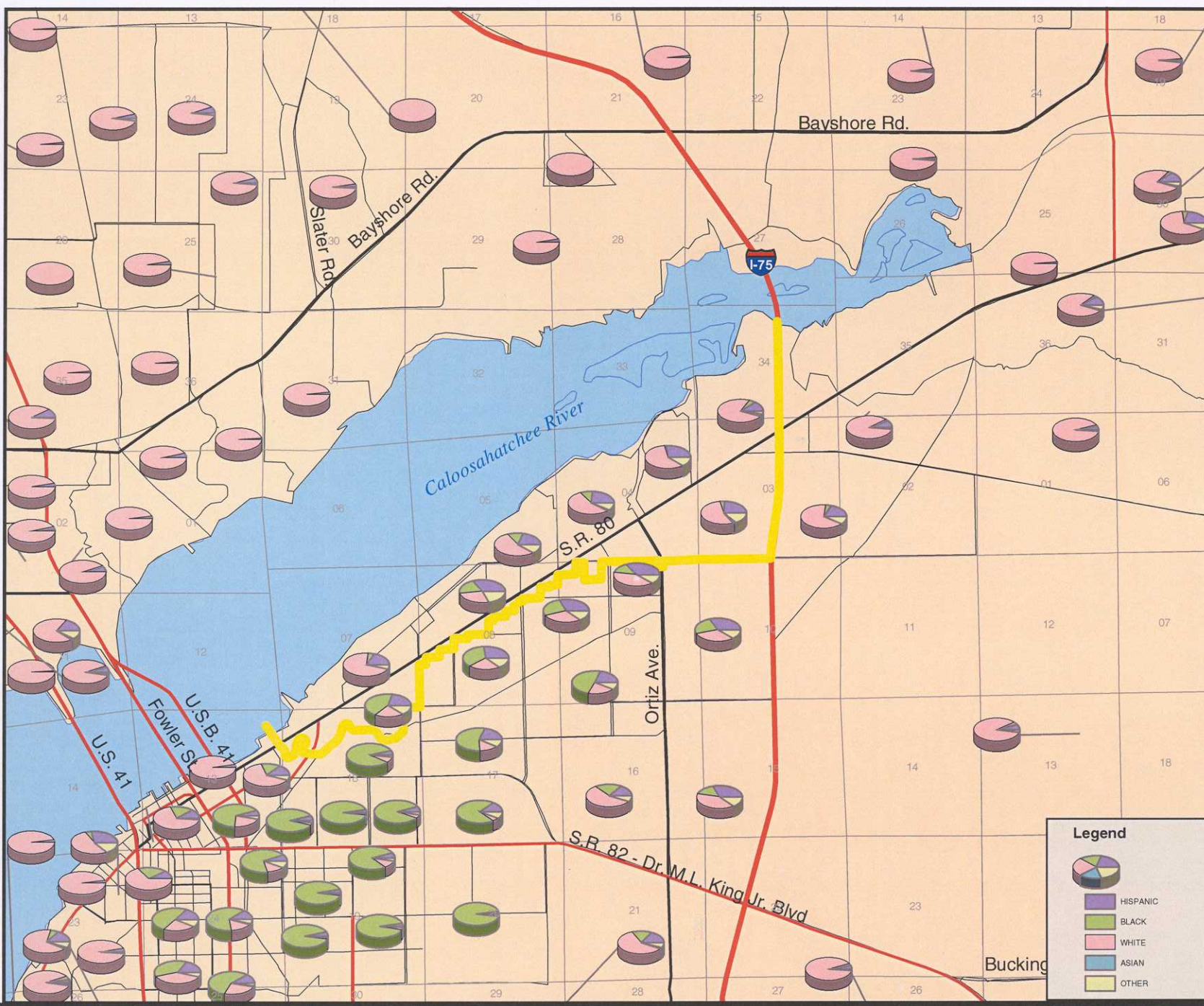
Sources: Lee County Property Appraiser & ESRI
It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained herein.

LEGEND:



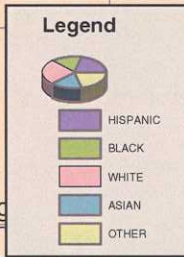
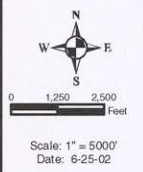
| Legend | |
|---------------------|-----------|
| HISPANIC | |
| [Lightest Pink Box] | >= 50 |
| [Light Pink Box] | 51 - 150 |
| [Medium Pink Box] | 151 - 250 |
| [Dark Pink Box] | 251 - 500 |
| [Darkest Pink Box] | < 500 |

Palm Beach Community Plan
Demographics - Hispanic Population
Exhibit VII
Census 2000

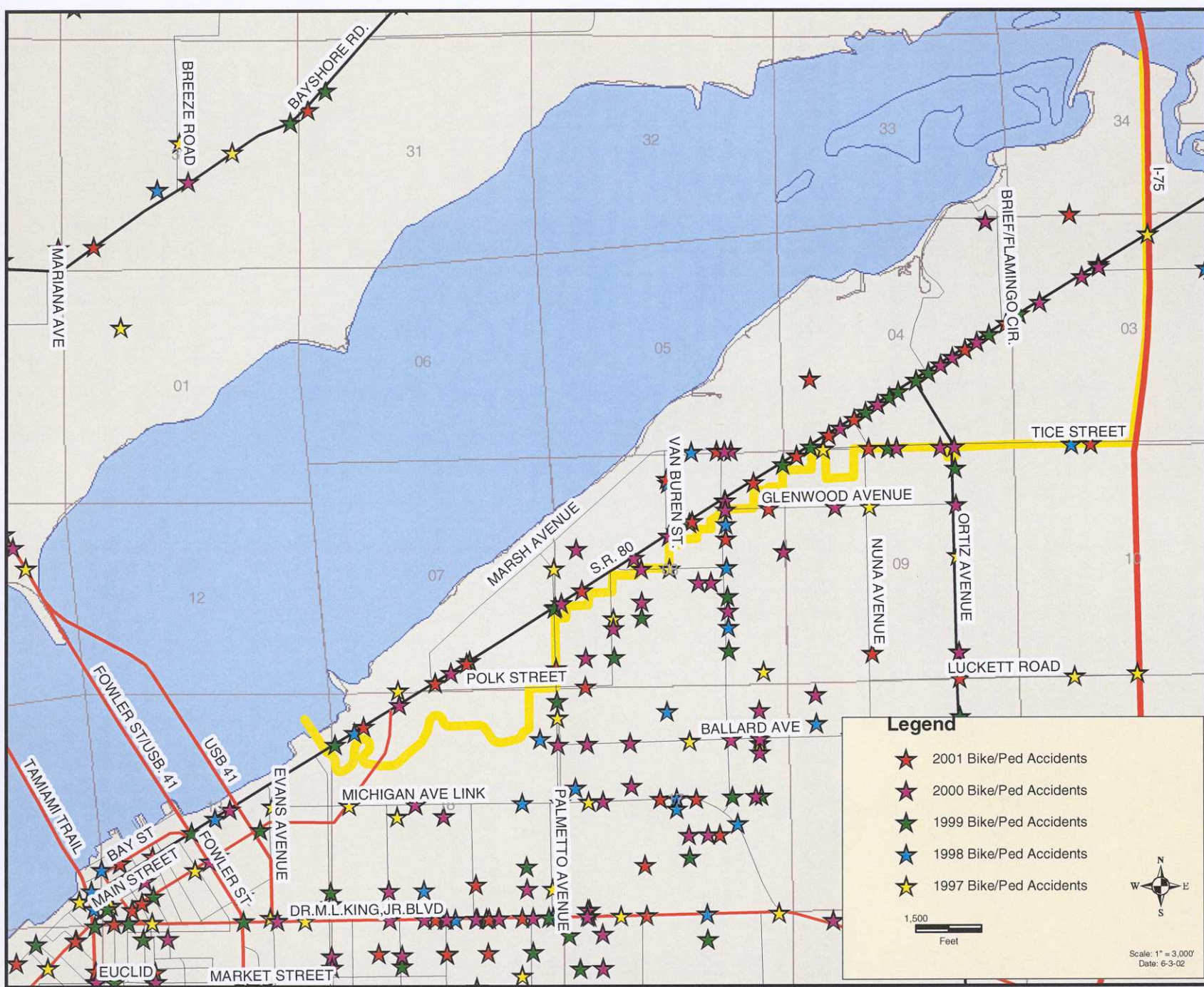


Sources: Lee County Property Appraiser & ESRI
It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained herein.






LEGEND:




Palm Beach Community Plan
Racial Composition
Exhibit VIII
2000 Census

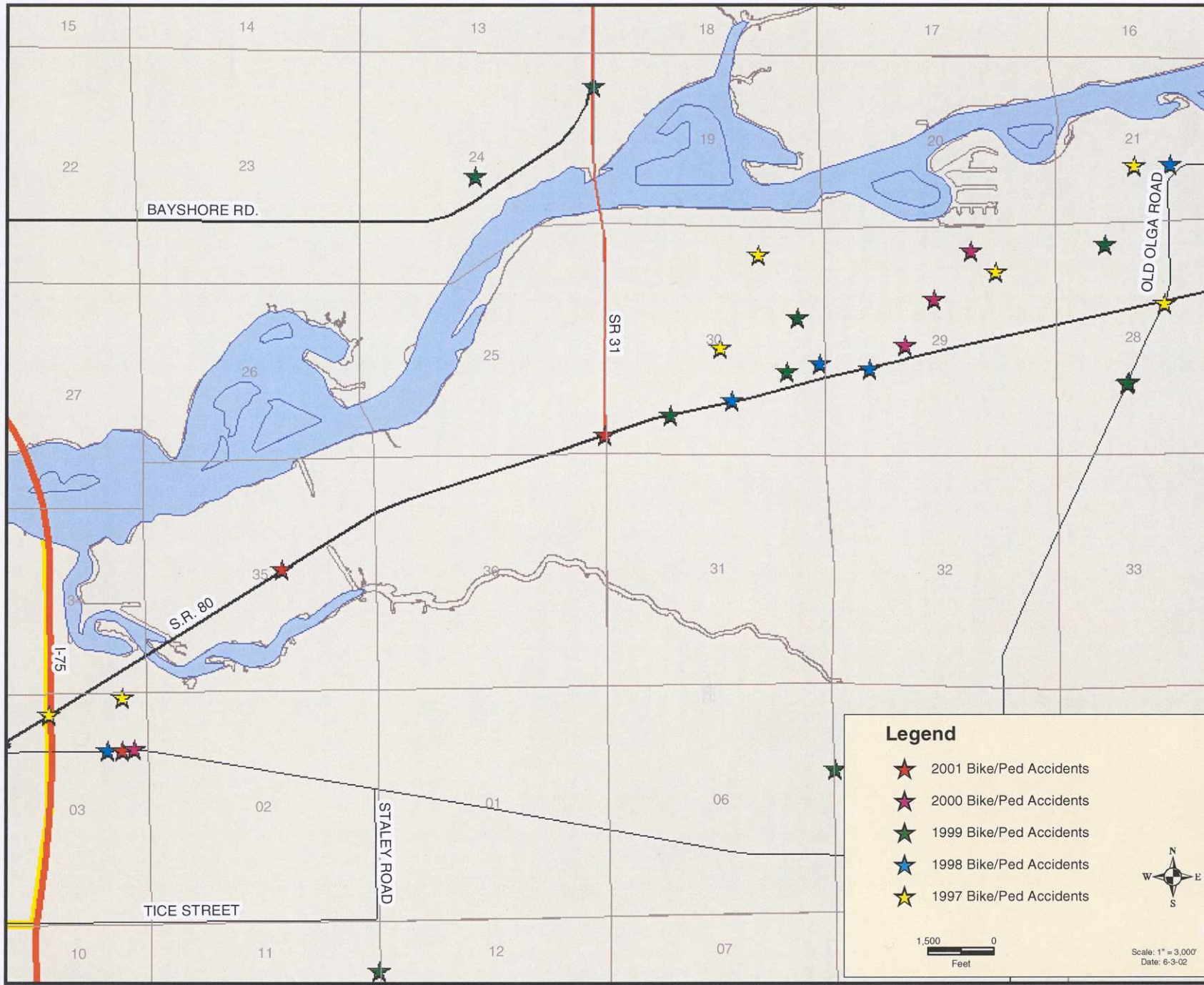


Legend

-  2001 Bike/Ped Accidents
-  2000 Bike/Ped Accidents
-  1999 Bike/Ped Accidents
-  1998 Bike/Ped Accidents
-  1997 Bike/Ped Accidents



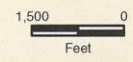
 Scale: 1" = 3,000'
 Date: 6-3-02



Sources: Lee County Property Appraiser
It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained hereon.

Palm Beach Community Plan
Bike and Pedestrian Accidents
Exhibit X

- Legend**
- ★ 2001 Bike/Ped Accidents
 - ★ 2000 Bike/Ped Accidents
 - ★ 1999 Bike/Ped Accidents
 - ★ 1998 Bike/Ped Accidents
 - ★ 1997 Bike/Ped Accidents



Scale: 1" = 3,000'
Date: 6-3-02



Source: Lee County Property Appraiser & Florida Department Of Transportation
It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained herein.

- LEGEND:**
- Fatal crash concentration 1995 - 1999 (11 Fatal's)
 - High crash segment 1998 & 1999
 - High crash segment 1997
 - Track crash concentration's 1995 - 1999 (16 Crashes)
 - High crash spot 1998 - 1999
 - High crash segment 1997
 - High crash segment 1998
 - High crash segment 1999



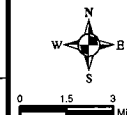
Palm Beach Community Plan
FDOT Crash Data
Exhibit XI



**Vanasse
Daylor**

Sources: Lee County Property Appraiser
It is the end user's responsibility to verify the data contained hereon.



LEGEND:

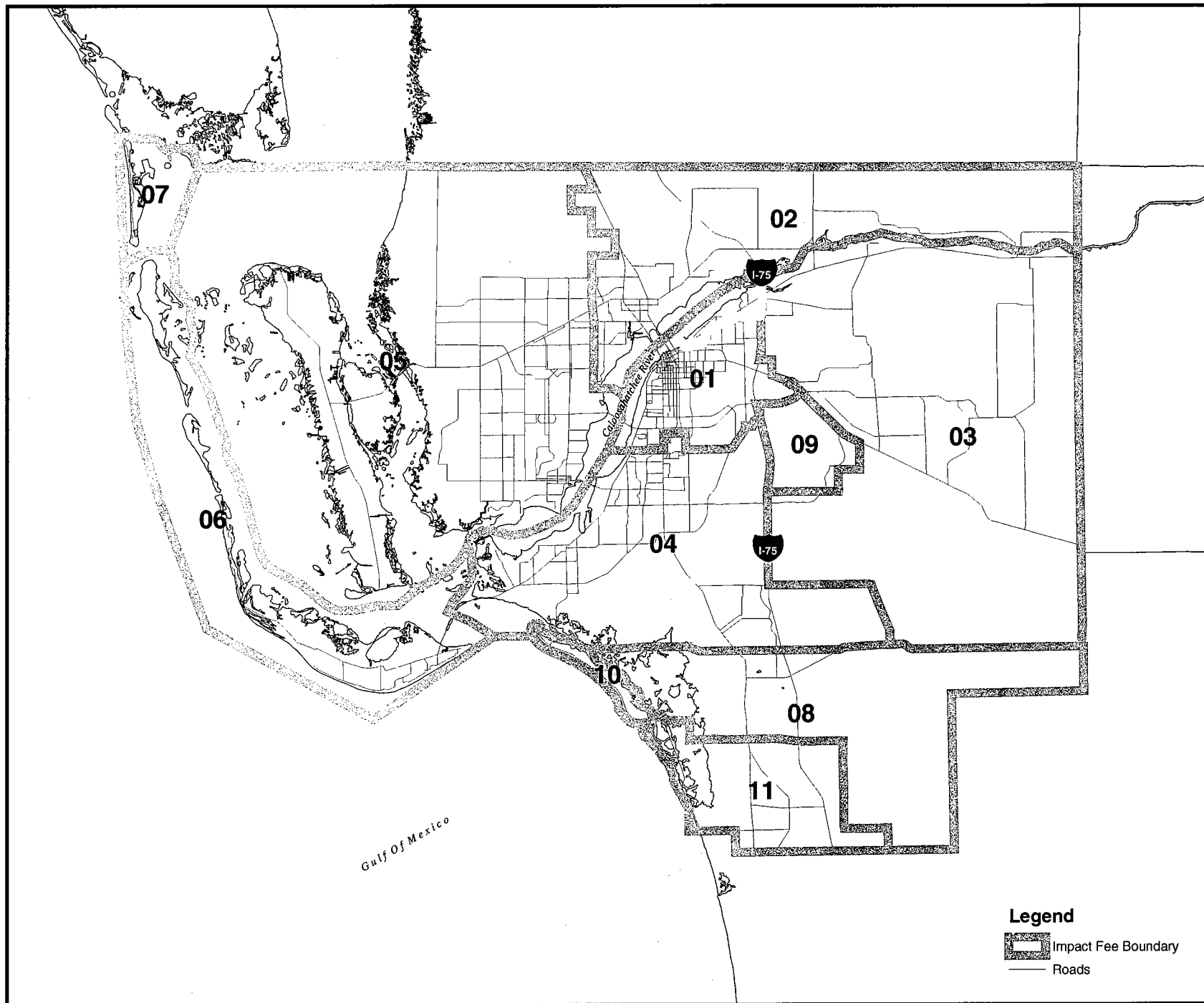


Scale: 1" = 6 mi.
Date: 6-25-02

**Palm Beach Community Plan
Impact Fee Zone
Exhibit XII**

Legend

-  Impact Fee Boundary
-  Roads



BACKGROUND SOURCES

Board, Prudy Taylor & Barlett, Patricia Pope, Lee County, A Pictorial History, The Donning Company, December 1990

Crowe, Timothy D., Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000

Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company, Downtown Fort Myers, April 2002

National Crime Prevention Council, Designing Safer Communities, National Crime Prevention Council, May, 1999

Susskind, Lawrence, The Consensus Building Handbook, Sage Publications, Inc., 1999

Urban Land Institute, Shopping Center Development Handbook, Urban Land Institute, 1999

The Urban Group, Inc., Tice Area Master Plan Overlay Zoning

The Urban Group, Inc., Tice Area Master Plan Overlay

Lee County Community Redevelopment Agency, State Road 80 CRA, June 1991, Lee County Community Redevelopment Agency