



# special places 5

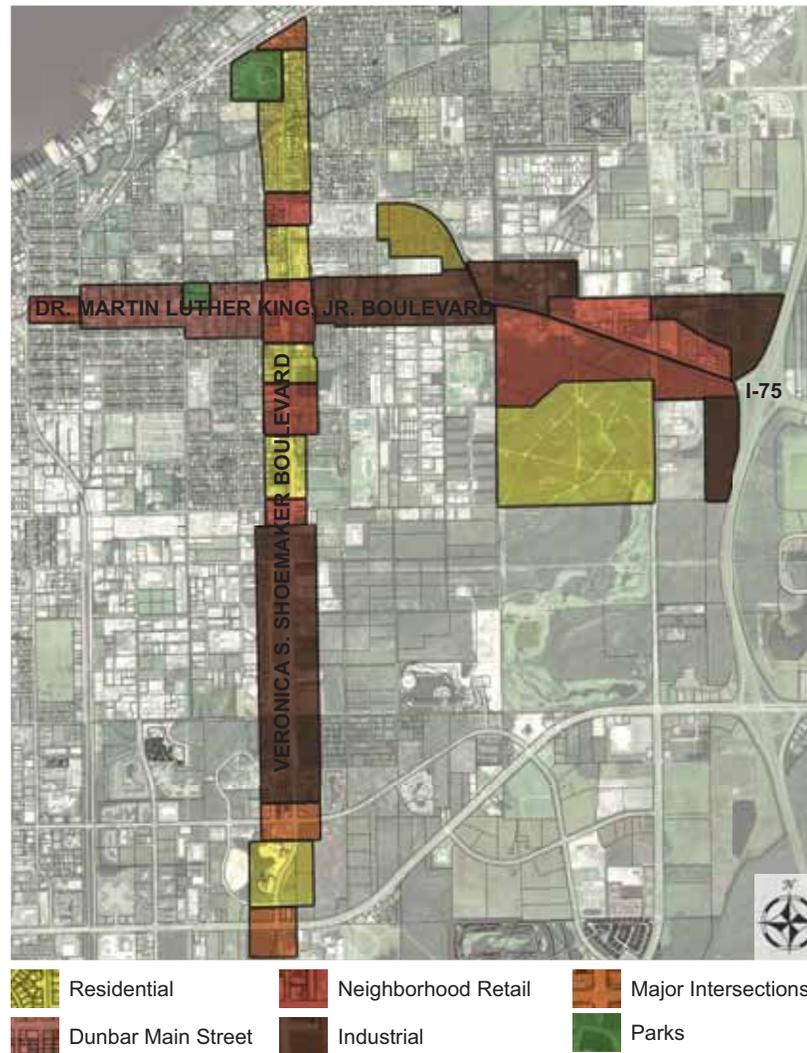
This Revitalization Plan for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard sets forth a coordinated strategy to guide appropriate growth and infill development along both corridors. The plan identifies key redevelopment sites and illustrates special gateways where civic spaces or attractive buildings can be placed in prominent positions along both corridors.

The corridors will mature around a series of special centers that are located at key intersections; each center becomes part of the foundation for the entire corridor. This chapter explains in detail the evolution of these centers and includes specific recommendations for each.

This chapter begins where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard leaves the downtown area and crosses Evans Avenue. This intersection is about to change dramatically with the imminent construction of three new northbound lanes just west of the railroad tracks that will feed traffic from Hanson Street into the existing northbound lanes that lead from the boulevard across the Caloosahatchee.

Heavy traffic flow will create a new barrier for pedestrians between Downtown and Dunbar. The intersection of Evans Avenue and Market Street will be closed entirely, blocking all east-west movement across Evans north of Edison. Two blocks of the original Evans Avenue from Larmie Street to MLK will be removed entirely.

In the distant future, the rail line that runs between the original Evans Avenue and the three new northbound lanes could become a commuter rail line that would have the opposite effect — reconnecting downtown with Dunbar, with pedestrians flowing to and from a Downtown station at MLK.



Florida DOT is evaluating the purchase of the rail right-of-way so that in the future it would be available for bus rapid transit or a commuter rail line that could run from Collier County through Bonita Springs and Fort Myers to Punta Gorda.

### NEIGHBORS' SUGGESTIONS

Here are some of the suggestions made by citizens' during initial meetings:

- Dunbar Main Street**
- Gateway to Dunbar
  - Infill Development
  - Community-based Retail
  - Entertainment
  - Variety of Housing Stock
  - Walkable Area

#### Major Intersections

- Corner stores

#### Neighborhood Retail

- Walkable Node
- Community-based Retail
- Take Advantage of Proximity to I-75: Entertainment, Hotels
- Fast food, restaurants, grocery store

#### Residential

- Walkable Node
- Housing – Townhouse, Rowhouse, Single Family
- Rehab Existing Housing

#### Industrial

- Clean Industry
- New Development Potential
- Mix of Uses: Commercial & Residential
- Affordable Housing
- Variety of Housing Types: Condo Warehouses; Buildings with Liners, Utilize Street Frontage

#### Parks

- Cultural Hub
- Tourist Attraction
- Entertainment, Recreation
- Infill Development
- Mix of Uses
- Neighborhood Serving Retail

## MCCOLLUM HALL

During the planning workshops the community identified McCollum Hall as an important community resource. Located at the western entrance of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard at the intersection of Cranford Avenue, McCollum Hall is a landmark building along the corridor.

McCollum Hall was built circa 1938. The building has a long history as a center for African-American culture and entertainment. Well known African-American musicians performed on the second floor

of McCollum Hall, which housed the renowned “dance hall,” making Dunbar an entertainment destination. Jazz music and entertainment filled the Hall on a regular basis for almost two decades.

Today McCollum Hall sits empty. While the use of the building has changed over time, the building itself has remained a constant reminder of a vibrant past. McCollum Hall should be restored and preserved to once again serve as the centerpiece of the community.

The draft plan illustrates how McCollum Hall could be restored, and adjacent parcels along Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard near Cranford Avenue could be filled in with new buildings, creating a gateway to the Dunbar neighborhood. Restoring this historic treasure is just the beginning – filling in the rest of the street scene with the fronts of new buildings will create a walkable pedestrian zone that can serve as an anchor for arts and entertainment in the community.



McCollum Hall could once again serve as an anchor in the community.

## WESTERN DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BOULEVARD

The area immediately east of McCollum Hall is comprised of a series of shallow parcels that were affected by the recent widening of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. It will be necessary for property owners to work together to make redevelopment and infill possible on these smaller lots. For example, church parking lots could be shared during the week to satisfy the parking requirements for local businesses on shallow lots.

In addition, changes to the existing zoning could make many of these parcels usable again. Some properties are just too small, even if the zoning is adjusted. In these instances, small park spaces may be the best use for the land.

Infill and redevelopment in this area will be very visible, as it is at the entrance to Downtown and in the heart of the Dunbar community. Redevelopment efforts in this area can serve as models and stimulate redevelopment along other areas of the corridor.



If church parking lots could be shared during the week, it is possible that the shallow lots along the south side of MLK might again support local businesses or civic endeavors, as shown in this drawing

### ACTION STEP # 1 WESTERN GATEWAY

The intersection of Cranford Avenue and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard was once a neighborhood center and could be brought back better than ever. Anchored by a renovated McCollum Hall and the Imaginarium, this corner could fuse tourism with local culture and serve as a western gateway to Dunbar.

- Encourage redevelopment of the southeast corner of Cranford Avenue and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to link McCollum Hall with the Imaginarium. Remove any regulatory roadblocks, including lot depth and on-site parking requirements for lots facing sidewalks (as described elsewhere in this plan) or rules which would preclude the adjoining church from sharing its parking lot when not needed for its own functions.
- Design a landscaped gateway to Dunbar immediately east of Cranford Avenue, using the retention areas on the north side of the boulevard and the lot remnants east of Palm Avenue.
- Encourage a joint venture between the owners of the historic McCollum Hall and private investors to restore the facility as a dining or entertainment venue. Ensure that city code enforcement liens don't make such a venture impossible.

## CLEMENTE PARK

Clemente Park is emerging as an important community resource; well-designed public spaces can enhance adjacent properties, creating special addresses. During the charrette, two potential options for redevelopment were illustrated. The first depicts a park dedicated to open space, with a large playfield for football and soccer, and a large amount of passive open space. The existing Black History Museum would remain, enhanced by its new surroundings. A new street through the park could be lined with on-street parking for visitors; this street would be faced with new buildings, providing a public edge to the park (rather than the backyards of existing homes which face the property today).

A pond located on the property could be part of a system that cleans storm water that now flows unfiltered down the Ford Street ditch before emptying into Billy Creek and the Caloosahatchee River. The existing canal on the western edge of the site could be piped to allow for bicycle and pedestrian connections to Dunbar Park north of Indian Street and then along the Fort Myers Cemetery to Billy Creek and Shady Oaks Park.

A civic building, potentially a cultural center, can be located across the playfield, with views over the park and toward Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. Sculptures could honor local heroes of Dunbar such as educators or sports figures. Clemente Park could even be extended to Dale Street as shown if private lot owners were interested in selling their lots.





A second option for the park reduces the amount of open space, but increases the number of community buildings. These buildings would have visual prominence along Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, and could hold a mix of uses, including cultural arts facilities, neighborhood commercial businesses, a community pool, and perhaps even residential uses. The buildings would create a cultural oasis for the Dunbar community; a smaller village green located directly to the north would be defined on all edges by new buildings. A new civic building (envisioned to be a cultural center) would have a prominent location at the end of the park. In this scenario, the historic Williams Academy (now serving as the Black History Museum) could be relocated to the western end of the park, into a more picturesque setting. On the western side of the park, passive open space and walking trails provide a relaxing environment for community residents.

A third park option would replace smaller community buildings with one or two larger buildings, which may be more suitable for a large cultural center. (See illustration on page 5.8.)





Park option #1 with a playfield

Rough Cost Estimates for Initial Phase of Clemente Park Improvements				
Item	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
Construct new east-west street w/parking both sides	750	LF	\$506.00	\$379,500
Add parallel parking on one side of side streets	1,200	LF	\$155.00	\$186,000
Edge treatment along MLK frontage	700	LF	\$100.00	\$70,000
Remove parking lot pavement	3,100	SY	\$7.00	\$21,700
Sod new park	25,652	SY	\$1.73	\$44,378
Pipe ditch, MLK Blvd. to Dale St.	750	LF	\$355.00	\$266,250
			TOTAL	\$967,828



Park option #2 with more community buildings and a town square



A variation on the second park option would replace smaller civic buildings with a single larger complex that could house a cultural center and other community activities

## ACTION STEP # 2 CLEMENTE PARK AND DUNBAR PARK

Clemente Park can become a highly visible and much-frequented centerpiece of Dunbar. Now that the city has acquired the lots that had separated the park from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the abandoned buildings can be removed, the Ford Street ditch can be crossed to reunite neighborhoods, and the park itself can be expanded once a community debate results in a consensus over its design.

- Many park design decisions remain to be made, but some features are common to each design:
  - Retain an open view across the park from the boulevard;
  - Improve park access and reconnect neighborhoods with a new street that crosses the Ford Street ditch;
  - Offer parallel parking in place of large parking lots;
  - Bring water into the park for ambience and to filter Stormwater flowing along the Ford Street ditch toward Billy Creek; and
  - Allow human-scaled building in the park to serve community functions.
- The new street will also provide a pedestrian link to nearby Dunbar Park and then through the Fort Myers Cemetery to Billy Creek, where a pedestrian bridge could connect directly to Shady Oaks Park and Terry Park.

Park option #3 with one large community building on the corner of MLK Boulevard and Henderson Avenue

## REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS ON SHALLOW LOTS

The recent widening of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard has made many business lots along the boulevard too small for redevelopment. The new eastbound lanes were built in part on land acquired from lot owners on the south side of the boulevard. The new westbound lanes were then rebuilt near where the original lanes had been or slightly to the north (see photograph taken during the widening, looking toward downtown, with the new eastbound lanes already completed).

In some cases, business lots became so shallow and isolated that they are suitable only for widened sidewalks, landscaping, or parallel parking. This situation occurs on the south side just east of Palm Avenue where the new road was placed even further to the south and almost immediately abutting a residential neighborhood.

In other cases, particularly from High Street to Ford Street, the lots were reduced from their original depth of 100' to 80' deep, making them difficult to redevelop under any circumstances but nearly impossible under the current regulations. Ironically, such lot reductions are explicitly forbidden by the city's Growth Management Code, yet despite being forced on landowners by government action, compensating code relief has yet to be provided.

Two sets of strategies are required to restore business potential to these lots:

- The first strategy is the formal waiver of several unnecessary dimensional restrictions. For example, the B-2 land-use designation has several requirements that waste precious space on these small lots: 25' front setback, 10' side setback, and 45% maximum lot coverage, and a height limit that depends on side setbacks. In addition, lots must be 100' wide and 100' deep, with no allowance for lots that no longer meet the depth requirement due to the widening of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.
- The second set of strategies would modify the wasteful practice of requiring ample parking spaces on every building site. Some parking strategies are regulatory in nature:
  - Eliminate (or lower) the city requirement for a set number of off-street parking spaces, given the accessibility of these sites to public transit and pedestrian traffic.

Others would require city-sponsored public works:

- Reconstruct selected side streets one block north and south of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to provide on-street (parallel) parking spaces that can be used by all local businesses.

Others would require cooperation between owners:

- Encourage shared parking among adjoining businesses even if they are under separate ownership and management.
- Encourage adjoining churches to share their parking lots with businesses, since these parking spaces would rarely be used during the same time period.



There are various ways that the regulatory strategies can be accomplished. One would be a new mixed-use classification that would replace B-2 entirely; another would be to create an overlay district that would retain the B-2 designation but make the necessary regulatory changes. Either approach could be applied to all lots in the city that are reduced in size by road widening projects, or to all land adjoining the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard corridor, or to all land in one of the four redevelopment areas along the boulevard (see Chapter 6).

The strategy of constructing on-street (parallel) parking on the first blocks north and south of the boulevard can be accomplished within existing rights-of-way. Most side streets are at least 50' wide, which is wide enough for parallel parking on both sides. The pavement would need to be widened, curbs added, drainage adjusted, and sidewalks moved to the edge of the right-of-way. These improvements can be made on individual blocks as tax-increment funding from the four redevelopment areas along the boulevard becomes available.

Rough Cost Estimates to Add On-Street Parking Both Sides, Add Curb and Gutter, and Move Sidewalks				
Item	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
North Street (assume 400' on each side)	400	LF	\$272.00	\$108,800
South Street (assume 200' on each side)	200	LF	\$272.00	\$54,400



### ACTION STEP # 3 BUSINESS LOTS DAMAGED BY FOUR-LANING OF MLK

The recent four-laning of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard has added new hurdles that interfere with redevelopment of the traditional business district. Some of these hurdles can be removed by changes to city development regulations and others can be offset by pooling parking spaces.

- Create an overlay district in the city's Growth Management Code to waive unnecessary dimensional restrictions on small B-2 business lots, particularly the 25' front setback, 10' side setback, height limit that depends on side setbacks, 100' lot width and depth, and 45% cap on lot coverage.
- Provide in this same overlay district that the minimum number of off-street parking spaces normally required by § 134-115 do not apply.
- Near business districts, reconstruct side streets one block north and south of the boulevard to provide on-street (parallel) parking spaces that can be used by all local businesses.

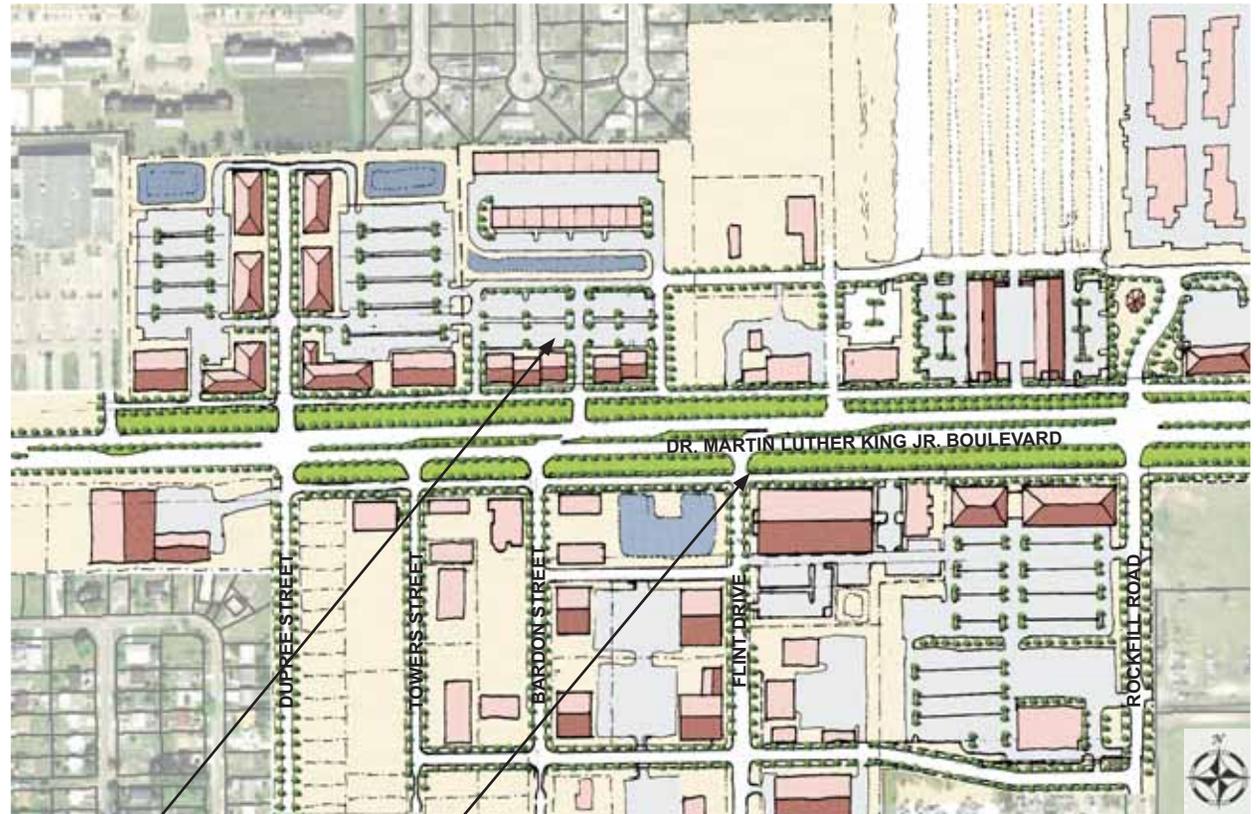
**EASTERN DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BOULEVARD**

Traveling east on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the character of the roadway and the adjacent built environment changes from a small-scale neighborhood to a more industrial setting of larger buildings and industrial complexes. The large-footprint industrial buildings are set back from the street in an auto-dominated environment. The industrial uses are separated from other land uses by large expanses of asphalt.

The plan for the eastern portion of the corridor calls for appropriate infill development over time. The industrial uses, which greatly contribute to the local economy, should remain, with complementary uses and building forms filling in the lost space along the corridor.

Infill development should follow good urban design principles to continue to improve the streetscape. Buildings should face the street, with parking located to the rear. A “boulevard slow lane” (a type of frontage road) could be constructed here to create a pedestrian-friendly frontage for new development. Over time, several pockets of pedestrian-oriented development should occur along this stretch of the corridor.

Specific areas for infill development are noted in the plan. The city should work with property owners to establish a comprehensive strategy for infill development and parcel assembly.



The site for the expanded Southwest Florida Enterprise Center; buildings can be located along the street, with parking behind.

A boulevard-style “slow lane” is an option to provide a pleasant pedestrian environment along the corridor.

Rough Cost Estimates to Construct a Boulevard Slow Lane - MLK from Dupree to Rockfill				
Item	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
Add 8' parking + 9' vehicle lane + Sidewalk	2,000	LF	\$242.00	\$484,000
Add 1 6' sidewalk to above estimates	2,000	LF	\$42.00	\$84,000
			TOTAL	\$568,000



#### ASSISTANCE FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

The city's Southwest Florida Enterprise Center (SWFEC, formerly known as the Business Development Center) and the FGCU-based Small Business Development Center (SBDC) are eager to expand their assistance to both start-up and established businesses in the community. The services offered by SWFEC are not well-enough known in the community despite the prominent location at 3901 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and the many startup businesses they have assisted.

Currently, SWFEC is home to 19 start-up businesses involved in service, construction, and light manufacturing, and has a waiting list of potential tenants. In addition to facilities from which start-up businesses can operate, the SWFEC offers tenants support services including business counseling and workshops to enhance management skills and efficient operations.

SWFEC has just received a \$1.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration toward increasing its business incubator space from 8,000 to 40,000 square feet. SWFEC will make space available to even more startup businesses by limiting the time period each may stay in this facility. This expansion is part of the joint redevelopment of the SWFEC site, which will be aided by available funding for the relocation of administrative offices for the Fort Myers Housing Authority.

There is no need to create new organizations to provide these services; better publicity can make more people aware of the services that are already available. Continued cooperation between the SBDC and SWFEC and other city programs will expand the range of businesses accommodated and the services that can be provided.

#### ACTION STEP # 4 SOUTHWEST FLORIDA ENTERPRISE CENTER

Expanding the number and variety of local businesses will make more consumer choices available to local residents, offer more opportunities for entrepreneurial activity, and retain more wealth in the community. Business training and start-up facilities are important for the launching and flourishing of local businesses.

- The city should continue to support and publicize the entrepreneurial assistance offered by the Southwest Florida Enterprise Center and the FGCU-based Small Business Development Center and the training opportunities of the High-Tech center located on Michigan Avenue.
- The new joint facility for the Enterprise Center and Housing Authority should place the business offices close to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. to extend the pedestrian character of the boulevard. Parking should be placed behind the offices, with the new business incubator space furthest to the rear.

## MICHIGAN COURT

Michigan Court is a public housing complex comprised of 470 multi-family units. Built in the 1960s as farmworker housing, the complex consists of primarily 2-story barrack style buildings scattered throughout the 54-acre site. Recognizing the need to completely redevelop the housing project, the Fort Myers Housing Authority applied for a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HOPE VI grant. The Housing Authority was recently awarded the grant and plans are now underway to demolish the aged structures and to rebuild Michigan Court as a mixed-income neighborhood. The HOPE VI effort was founded upon the belief that public housing complexes could be turned into real neighborhoods; there are several successful examples of this type of transformation found throughout Florida and the country.

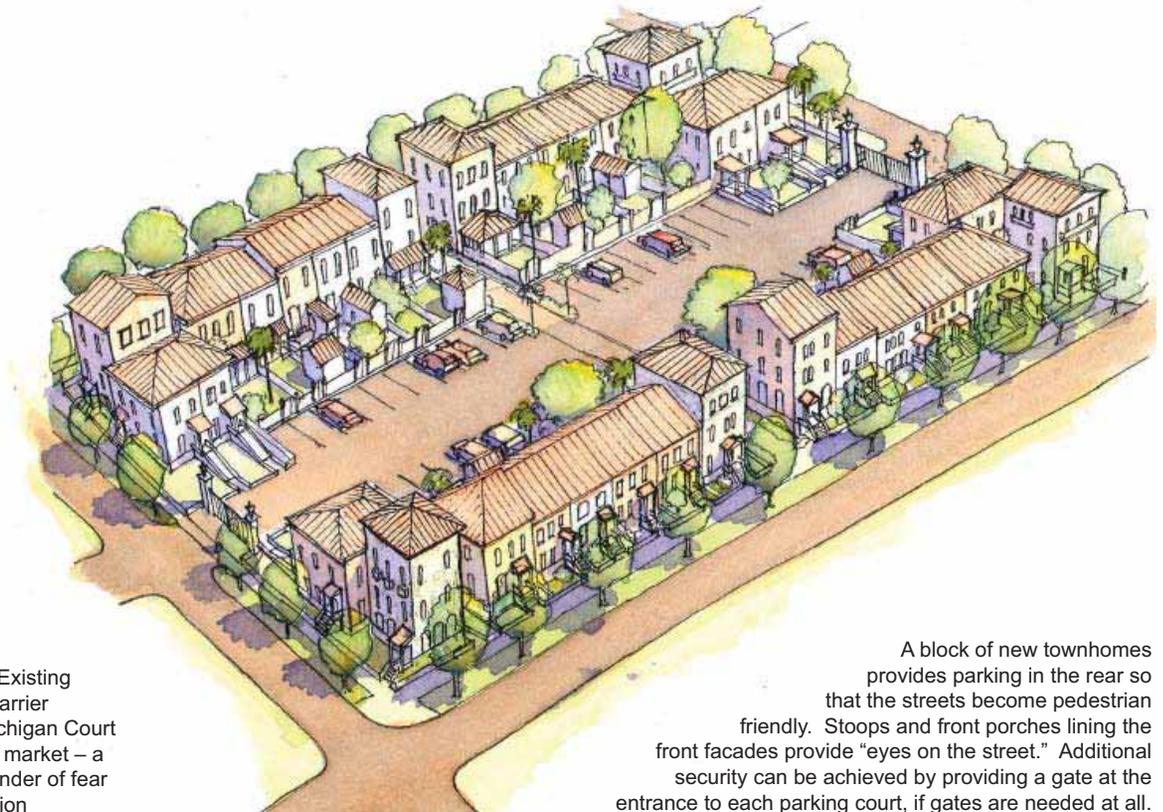


*On the left:* Existing razor-wire barrier between Michigan Court and the flea market – a chilling reminder of fear and separation

During the planning workshop the design team reviewed and revised the preliminary Housing Authority plan for the redevelopment of Michigan Court. The revised plan modifies the proposed campus-style plan into a connected network of streets and blocks. In doing so, the streets and blocks are re-knit with the surrounding neighborhoods, including a future connection to the Sabal Palms site, ensuring the long-term formation of a complete community. A variety of housing types are proposed for the site, including single-family homes, duplexes, and townhomes. Regardless of

housing type, all buildings in the new development should have doors and windows facing streets and public spaces. Parking would be located on-street or behind the buildings. Facing streets with the front of buildings, and locating the parking to the rear, the streets can form high-quality public spaces which can be enjoyed by pedestrians and community residents.

The city and Housing Authority should modify the preliminary site plan so that it is based on an interconnected network of streets and blocks.



A block of new townhomes provides parking in the rear so that the streets become pedestrian friendly. Stoops and front porches lining the front facades provide “eyes on the street.” Additional security can be achieved by providing a gate at the entrance to each parking court, if gates are needed at all.



Preliminary plan



Revised plan

#### ACTION STEP # 5 MICHIGAN COURT

Over-concentrations of public housing are inherently problematic. The Fort Myers Housing Authority has a rare opportunity to entirely rebuild Michigan Court; it can replace the housing stock for its residents on a network of traditional streets and blocks, which will create a safer and more diverse neighborhood of highly valued houses and apartments.

- Modify the preliminary campus-style site plan into a connected network of streets and blocks, including a future connection to the neighborhood to the southwest.
- All types of housing should have doors and windows facing streets and public spaces, with parking on-street or behind the buildings.

## SAVE OUR HOMES

During the planning charrette for this revitalization effort, it became apparent that many local homeowners fear that successful revitalization would increase their property values and force them out of their homes due to rising property taxes. In fact, the "Save Our Homes" program in Florida's constitution limits tax increases on homestead properties regardless of how much the value of the property may increase.

A lot becomes a homestead property when it is the primary residence of the lot owner. Owners of homestead properties do not pay property taxes on the first \$25,000 of the property's value.

A much larger benefit began to accrue to homestead properties when the Florida Constitution was amended in 1992 to add an additional benefit. This amendment was the result of a referendum called "Save Our Homes," which limits property tax increases to 3% each year regardless of how much the property value may have increased during that year. This benefit continues each year until the property is sold or until the owner no longer resides there.

Wider knowledge of this program should reassure homeowners and make them more willing to support revitalization efforts (although it must be acknowledged that this program helps owners of homestead properties at the expense of renters and owners of commercial properties).

## STATE FUNDS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In 1992, the state created a Housing Trust Fund funded by a small tax on real estate document stamp fees. Until 2003, this fund was used exclusively to help build affordable housing across the state. In recent years, state officials have been placing as little as one-fourth of the available revenue into the Housing Trust Fund. This shortfall starves the revenues available to local officials to address the burgeoning housing affordability crisis. City and county officials should continue to press the governor and legislature to restore funding to previous levels.

Lately, property values have increased faster than the rise in the income levels. For example, the relatively slow growth of Lee County's 2005 median income level to \$54,100 has been dwarfed by the significant rise in the area's average single-family home price of nearly \$300,000. This gap will make the development of new affordable housing more difficult; many additional steps are needed, including new emphasis on infill housing near important transportation corridors like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevards.

## THE SHIP PROGRAM

The State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) Program is a housing initiative funded through the state of Florida documentary stamp tax, which is employed by the City of Fort Myers, as its primary vehicle in assisting eligible households to purchase a home. It is administered through the City of Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA).

Eligible candidates must apply for participation in the SHIP program, attend homeowner classes presented by the CRA, clear up any outstanding credit problems that exist, agree to a second mortgage, and find an eligible house.

The City of Fort Myers SHIP Program provides potential homeowners with assistance in:

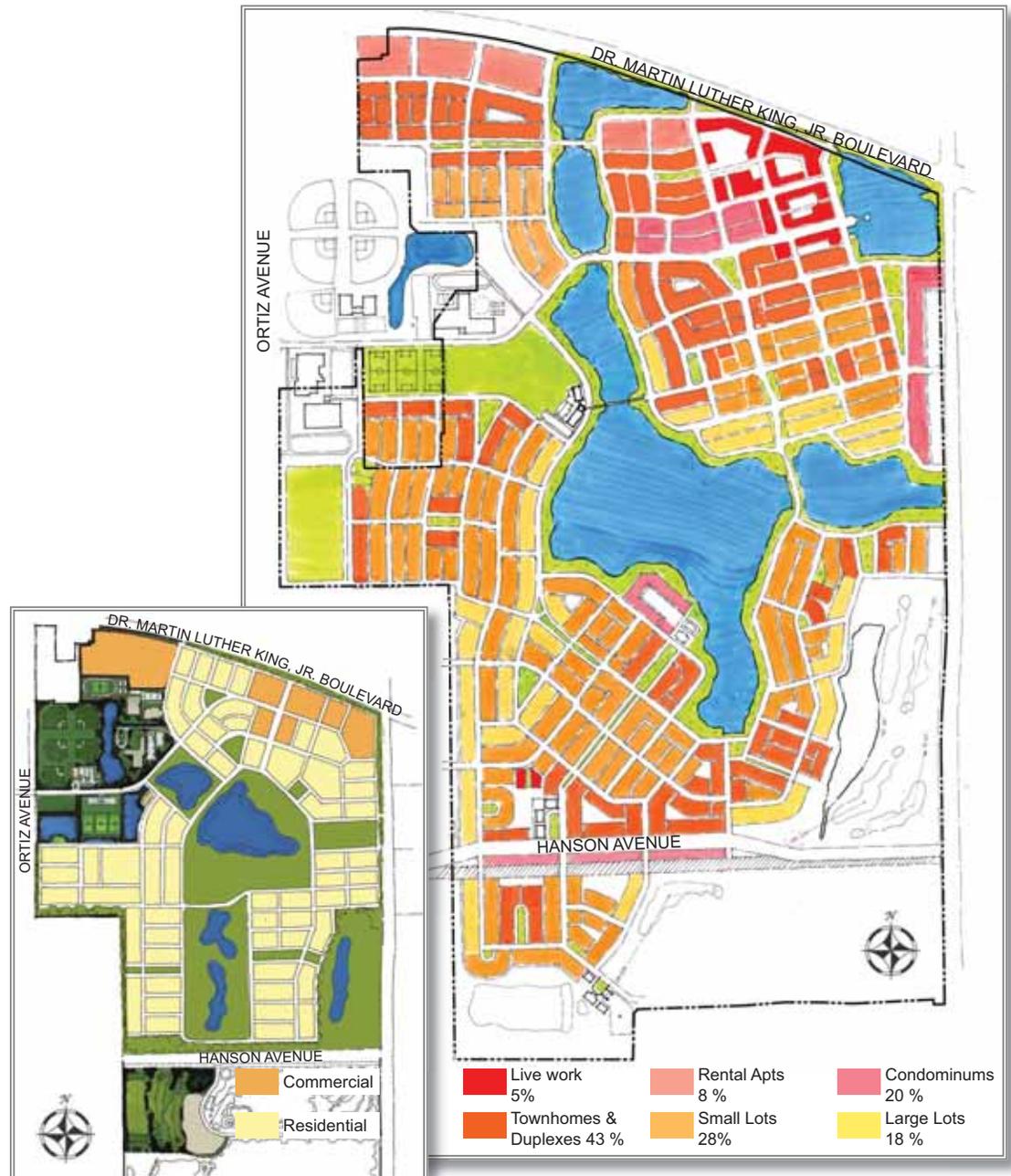
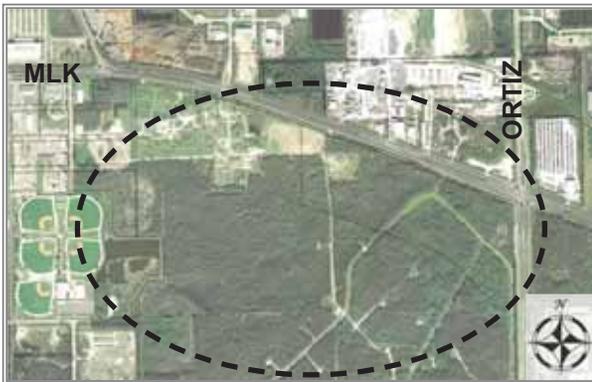
- Determining their funding options
- Accessing credit situation, and where relevant, providing guidance in credit repair.
- Obtaining first mortgage from a local lender
- Monitoring closing costs, and
- Providing a qualified contractor.

**CITY WELLFIELD SITE - EASTWOOD VILLAGE**

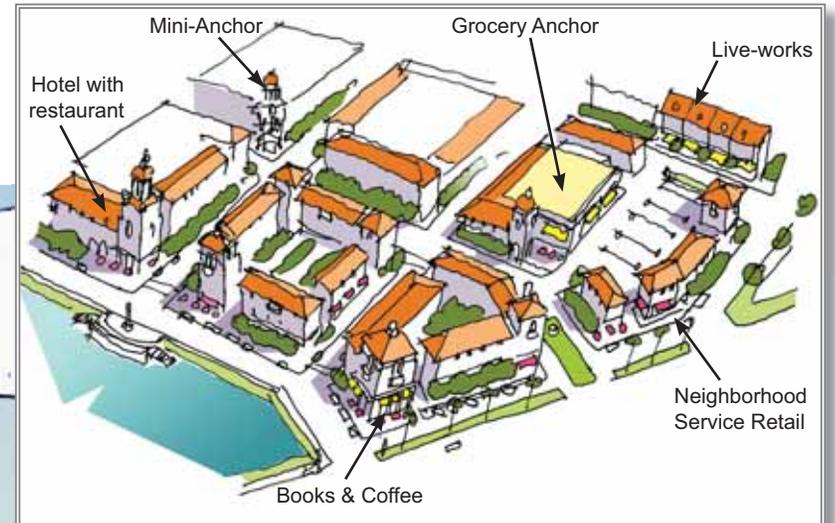
The City of Fort Myers is negotiating with the Bonita Bay Group to redevelop the former city wellfield at the corner of Ortiz Avenue as a series of neighborhoods to be known as Eastwood Village. The area between the Edison Avenue extension and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard has great potential as a neighborhood-oriented town center around a new pedestrian-friendly Main Street that would run perpendicular to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.

Housing within the new development should include market-rate and workforce housing, and a wide variety of housing types. The cost of workforce housing can be reduced through higher densities and through a portion of the taxes generated by the market-rate housing. A site is being reserved for a new neighborhood school.

Below is the first alternative plan designed during the charrette in December 2005, showing a network of streets and blocks with a traditional town center to the north near Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. Edison Avenue and Hanson Street are extended eastward to Ortiz Avenue. To the right, another development option created during a follow-up workshop hosted by the Bonita Bay Group. This plan, a product of collaboration between Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin Lopez Rinehart, Tunnell-Spangler-Walsh Associates, Bonita Bay Group, Dover Kohl and Partners, and City of Fort Myers, shows a truly mixed-income neighborhood composed of several different housing types.



An aerial view of what Eastwood Village town center might look like is shown to the right. When fully developed, it would serve the daily needs of the residents of Eastwood Village and all other nearby neighborhoods. The town center would anchor the eastern end of the MLK study area and would convert this nondescript intersection into a memorable gateway into Dunbar and all of Fort Myers from points east.



Above is a rendering looking to the town center from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.

Below is a sample of the sections the design team studied to understand the existing conditions and create special places in the plan.

To the right is a conceptual diagram showing the major elements of the plan:

- The town center and its key location with its proximity to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and I-75
- Neighborhoods and their centers
- Connecting the neighborhoods
- Water system



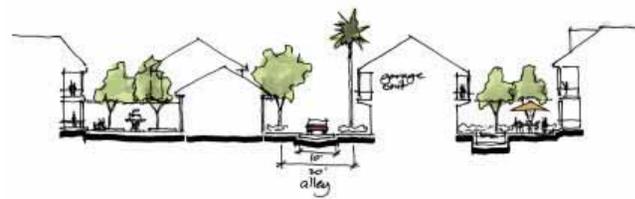
Proposed section for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard



Proposed section for Hanson Avenue



Proposed section for Eastwood Village lake drive



Proposed section for Eastwood Village alley

#### ACTION STEP # 6 EASTWOOD VILLAGE

The city's abandoned wellfield at Ortiz Avenue offers Fort Myers an opportunity to stimulate city living by creating new neighborhoods that will rival the best in the city. Through the city's ownership of the land, housing can be priced at levels that are affordable for year-round residents.

- The city should insist that Eastwood Village thoroughly integrate a variety of market-rate and workforce housing on traditional interconnected blocks.
- Eastwood Village must accommodate the extension of Hanson Street to Ortiz Avenue and allow Edison Avenue to flow through the property providing access to the north, east, and south.

**GATEWAY TO THE CITY**

The area of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard between Ortiz Avenue and I-75 serves as the gateway to the City of Fort Myers. Visitors to the City will pass through this area; it will be their first impression of the City after exiting the interstate. Due to this visibility, this location is ideal for commercial and entertainment destinations.

The plan allows for a mix of uses within a variety of building types and forms. Instead of vast expanses of surface parking, parking is located on-street or mid-block. Buildings would line the parking areas and the fronts of buildings would face pedestrian-scaled streets. Doors and windows facing the street in commercial uses allow for viable storefront addresses. Large sites are included in the plan to accommodate larger retailers. Ample space for a hotel is provided adjacent to the interstate, and fueling facilities could be located in convenient but not visually dominating locations.

If good urban design principles are followed as parcels are developed (such as facing the street with the front of buildings), the future redevelopment of these parcels will add value to the entire corridor.

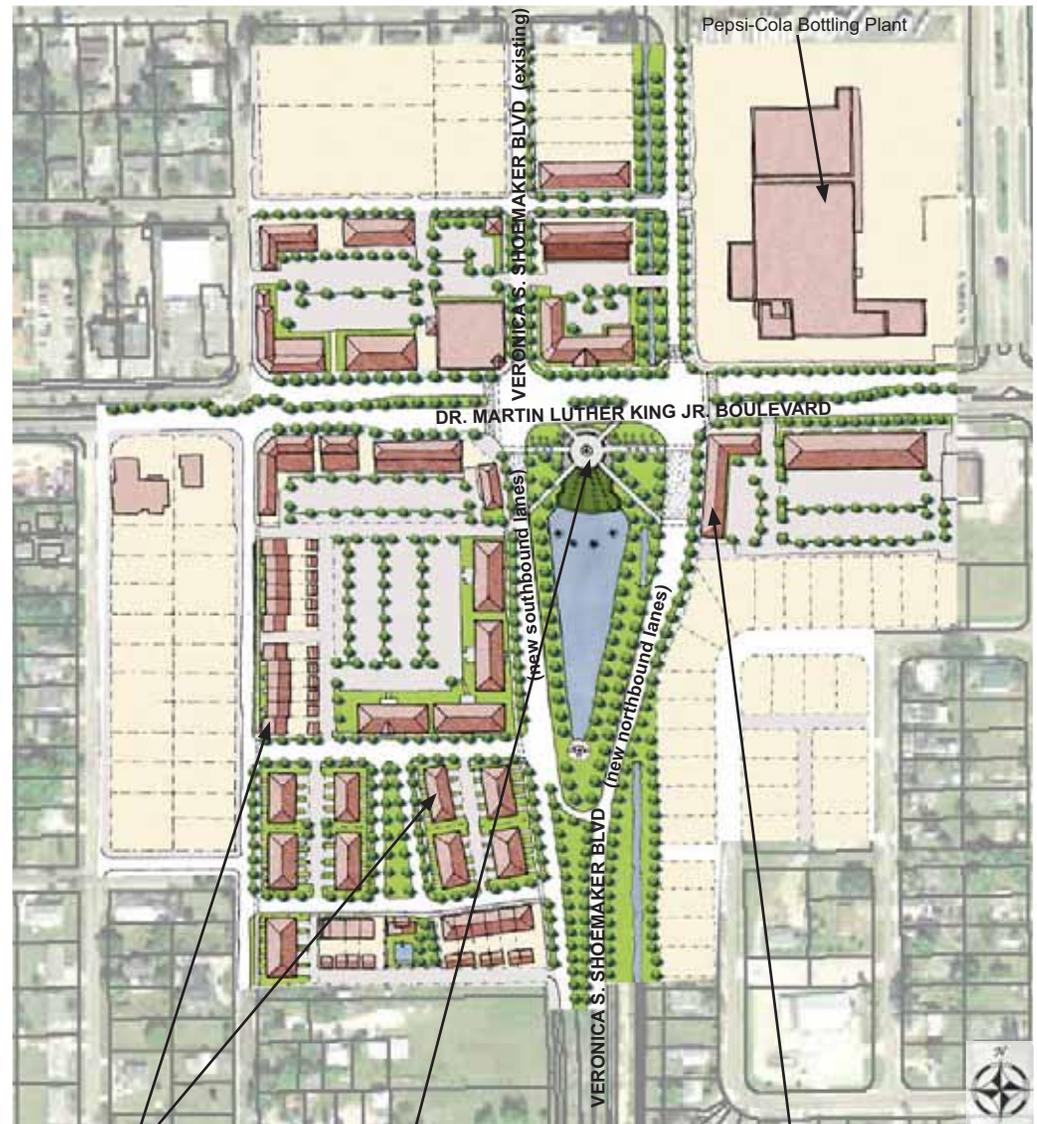


## MID-TOWN DUNBAR



The intersection of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevards will be a very visible place in the community— the intersection of two main north/south and east/west corridors. A mixture of uses will help to create a walkable center at this important intersection. Housing— both rental and owner-occupied— could be located above commercial uses, and in the blocks beyond.

Along the south side of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, the commercial parcels have been compromised by the recent road improvements. West of Veronica S. Shoemaker, these parcels can still be suitable for neighborhood businesses. Between the northbound and southbound lanes of Shoemaker Boulevard, limited access makes the area a difficult site for commercial redevelopment, but the site does have the potential to become a formal civic space. The visual prominence of the site calls for an important landmark to be located here; suggestions have included commemorating local culture by placing a statue at the north edge of this park showcasing a noted local figure, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, or civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks, for example.



Affordable housing – both rental and owner-occupied – could be located along the new Shoemaker Boulevard.

A memorial statue celebrating local culture could be placed at the intersection of MLK and VSS Boulevards

If the FDOT retention ponds were relocated, new commercial or mixed-use buildings could be located on these parcels near the sidewalk, giving better access for pedestrians along the street, with parking in the rear.

## **ACTION STEP # 7 MID-TOWN DUNBAR**

The new intersection of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard is too important to be left to the vagaries of generic roadside strip development. This intersection deserves a prominent cultural landmark, and dignified housing should be added nearby.

- The city should acquire the two small lots on the south side between the new lanes of Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard and combine them with the adjoining lake into a small formal park with sculpture that commemorates local culture.
- The southwest quadrant of this intersection is an ideal location for an affordable multifamily housing complex. Much of the site was recently acquired by an experienced developer for this purpose. The city should encourage this proposal and grant development approvals if it complies with the site design and standards in this plan. These approvals should allow a 5%-10% reduction in minimum dwelling unit sizes to improve affordability.

### **AFFORDABLE HIGH-QUALITY RENTAL HOUSING**

New high-quality rental housing can be constructed by private developers with housing tax credit subsidies. The resulting housing is similar in quality to the apartments built in recent years along Winkler Avenue. Due to program requirements, housing built under this program must provide many on-site amenities, forcing such housing to be built in increments of at least 100 or more dwelling units. Housing built under this program must retain its affordability for at least 30 years after construction. Generally a county only can qualify for one such project each year. Last year the 160-unit "Hibiscus Isle" affordable family housing development on Ortiz Avenue at the corner of East Michigan was funded; and the Fort Myers Housing Authority may seek this funding to replace their Flossie Riley senior housing complex.

Sites near Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard will be treated favorably by this program due to their proximity to shopping and public transit routes. A particularly favorable site has been assembled by developers just south of the boulevard between Highlands Avenue and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard. During the charrette and in consultation with the new owners, preliminary site plans were developed for this property, as shown in the illustration. (The urban design techniques used are similar to those applied to the Towles Garden site, as described later in this plan.)

One impediment to the realization of this project is the minimum dwelling unit size requirements in the city's Growth Management Code. Based on recently completed housing developments in other parts of the state, the code's minimum sizes are about 5%-10% larger than needed by many families; affordability would be promoted by reducing these standards accordingly.

**VERONICA S. SHOEMAKER BOULEVARD:  
MICHIGAN AVENUE TO BILLY CREEK**

Established residential neighborhoods surround Shoemaker Boulevard from Michigan Avenue to Billy Creek. Community members’ ideas for this area included infill housing for vacant parcels and property rehabilitation programs for existing dilapidated houses.

The existing drainage canal along the western edge of Shoemaker Boulevard is problematic due to dangerous slopes, litter accumulation, and sediment contamination as stormwater rushes into Billy Creek. Because this is the only crossing of Billy Creek between Seaboard and Marsh, there is a large volume of traffic and very poor facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists. This canal provides almost no stormwater detention or treatment and could be replaced by a linear park that would provide pedestrian and bicycle connections northward to Shady Oaks and Terry Park and to all adjoining neighborhoods. At each point where stormwater now enters this canal, oil separators and other filtration devices could be installed to cleanse the water before it enters the new culverts that would replace the canal.

An alternative would be to divert this water flow to vacant land between Brookhill Drive and Fort Myers Cemetery where it could be treated in lakes before flowing into Billy Creek. These lakes could be configured as a stormwater park and be tied in with the new pedestrian system connecting Clem-

ente Park, Dunbar Park, Fort Myers Cemetery, and Shady Oaks Park. This alternative would be similar to another combined water quality and recreational project being planned by city officials further upstream on Billy Creek.



Rough Cost Estimates for Piping Drainage Canal along VSS from Michigan to Billy Creek				
Item	Quantity	Unit	Unit Cost	Estimated Cost
Pipe Ditch	2,100	LF	\$355.00	\$745,500
Linear Park/Multi-Use Path	2,100	LF	\$98.00	\$205,800
			TOTAL	\$951,300



#### **ACTION STEP # 8 VERONICA S. SHOEMAKER BOULEVARD DRAINAGE CANAL**

The drainage canal along Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard north of Michigan Avenue is not safe for children or pedestrians and it provides very little cleansing of stormwater flowing toward Billy Creek. Both problems could be improved within the existing right-of-way.

- Some stormwater treatment could be provided underground in the space now used for the drainage canal. This would improve water quality in Billy Creek and the Caloosahatchee while allowing the creation of a linear park along Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard, eliminating the safety hazard and restrictions on pedestrian and bicycle travel north of Michigan Avenue.
- As an alternative, the canal could be filled to create the linear park while Stormwater is routed west under Michigan Avenue to new stormwater detention lakes on vacant land along the south bank of Billy Creek. These lakes could be configured as a stormwater park and be tied in with the new pedestrian system connecting Clemente Park, Dunbar Park, Fort Myers Cemetery, and Shady Oaks Park.

## VERONICA S. SHOEMAKER BOULEVARD: BILLY CREEK TO PALM BEACH BOULEVARD

The intersection of Shoemaker Boulevard with Palm Beach Boulevard is a major commercial location now dominated by older buildings, many in need of upgrading or replacement. Palm Beach Boulevard suffers from many of the same problems as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard: obsolete building stock; an overly wide road dominated by the automobile yet serving high pedestrian volumes; and dangerous pedestrian crossings. Most of the strategies proposed in this plan for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard apply equally near this intersection.

From the commercial strip southward to Billy Creek, older residential neighborhoods are on the east side of Shoemaker Boulevard. Many homes are in need of rehabilitation, and there are opportunities for infill housing on vacant lots.

On the west side of Shoemaker Boulevard are two jewels of the local park system: Shady Oaks Park and Terry Park. Shady Oaks Park is owned and managed by the city of Fort Myers on parcels extending from Marion Street to Billy Creek. The park includes softball and soccer fields, a picnic pavilion, a recreation center, mature oak trees, and a walking trail leading to a fishing pier on Billy Creek, one of the few public access points to the creek.

Just north of Shady Oaks Park is Terry Park, a historic Lee County facility. One hundred years ago Terry Park began as a yacht and country club. Since then it has been home to the Lee County Fair (later the Southwest Florida Fair, until 1978), motorcycle and horse races, professional wrestling, high school and college sporting events, and spring training for major league baseball (until 1989).

Shady Oaks Park and Terry Park are ideally located near the heart of Fort Myers; however, they are not easily accessible from the south because Billy Creek greatly limits road connections. Two improved connections are suggested in this plan: better bicycle and pedestrian access along Shoemaker as described on the previous page, and a pedestrian bridge over Billy Creek that connects Shady Oaks Park to a trail through the Fort Myers Cemetery leading to Clemente Park.



Terry Park, (looking towards Downtown Fort Myers) in the late 1930s; Shady Oaks Park is in the upper left; Palmetto Avenue (now Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard) begins at the lower right; produce and livestock exhibits for Southwest Florida Fair were located in the circular buildings

*\* Courtesy of Sporting News*



#### **ACTION STEP # 9 TERRY PARK AND SHADY OAKS PARK**

Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard ends at Terry Park. This historic facility, and the adjoining city-owned Shady Oaks park along the north bank of Billy Creek, are located and equipped well but are underutilized in part due to limited access to the south.

- Access to both parks would be improved with a pedestrian bridge connecting Fort Myers Cemetery with Shady Oaks Park and with a new linear park replacing the drainage canal along Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard.

## VERONICA S. SHOEMAKER BOULEVARD & EDISON AVENUE

The intersection of Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard & Edison Avenue is prominently located within the community, and would make an ideal location for neighborhood-oriented, mixed-use development. Once the new roadway is complete, parcels that were previously underutilized will have new visibility in the community.

The Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) currently owns the southwest corner of this intersection and plans to develop it with affordable townhouses. This housing would enhance the surrounding areas if designed with blocks and streets that connect to the adjacent neighborhood. A frontage road could be utilized along Veronica S. Shoemaker to create a pedestrian-friendly entrance to new homes.

The city could purchase the junkyard a few blocks to the west and add housing there that could also become part of the neighborhood while improving property values for surrounding blocks. (see more details of this proposal in Chapter 6).

A slow lane allows pedestrian-friendly access to new homes.

A neighborhood park will provide a formal gathering space for residents, and preserve a portion of the existing tree canopy.

The existing junkyard can be redeveloped as housing and integrated into the existing residential neighborhood.





Proposed redevelopment of the intersection of Shoemaker Boulevard and Willard Street



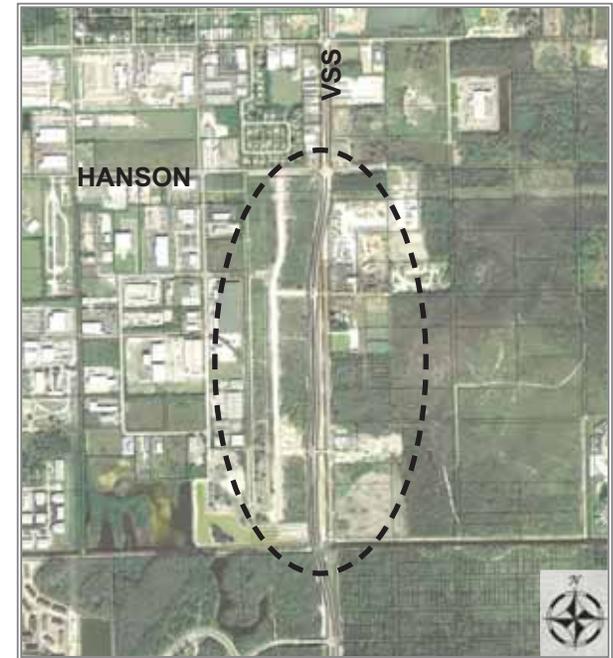
Frontage road allows easy access to the warehouses

New warehouses should be built close to the street, with parking and service access behind

Potential mixed-use neighborhood

**VERONICA S. SHOEMAKER BOULEVARD: SOUTH**

Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard between Canal Street and the North Colonial Waterway is designated for business and industrial uses. New businesses and infill development should be supported and encouraged along this corridor. As with the eastern end of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, there exists a great opportunity for infill development, and if done properly, the new development will enhance the surrounding area. New design standards for this section of roadway should regulate where buildings are placed, and prohibit blank walls from facing Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard.



**VERONICA S. SHOEMAKER BOULEVARD & WINKLER AVENUE;  
VERONICA S. SHOEMAKER BOULEVARD & COLONIAL BOULEVARD**

The intersections of Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard and Winkler Avenue and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard and Colonial Boulevard have similar physical characteristics. These intersections have the potential for additional infill development. The width and number of travel lanes at these intersections hamper pedestrian flow across the street; however, new development at the corners should be designed with pedestrian flow in mind, to foster connections to other surrounding areas.

Lee County is now proceeding with plans to extend Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard further south of Colonial, to tie into Plantation Road which ultimately leads all the way to Daniels Parkway and to Six Mile Cypress Parkway. As this road is extended further to the south, its economic and traffic-flow benefits becomes increasingly important.



Potential infill site

Neighborhood green

Parking areas are lined with buildings