



research 1

“It’s a historical day for the city. We’re trying to get new economic development in the Dunbar area. I believe that (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard) is the gateway of the city.”

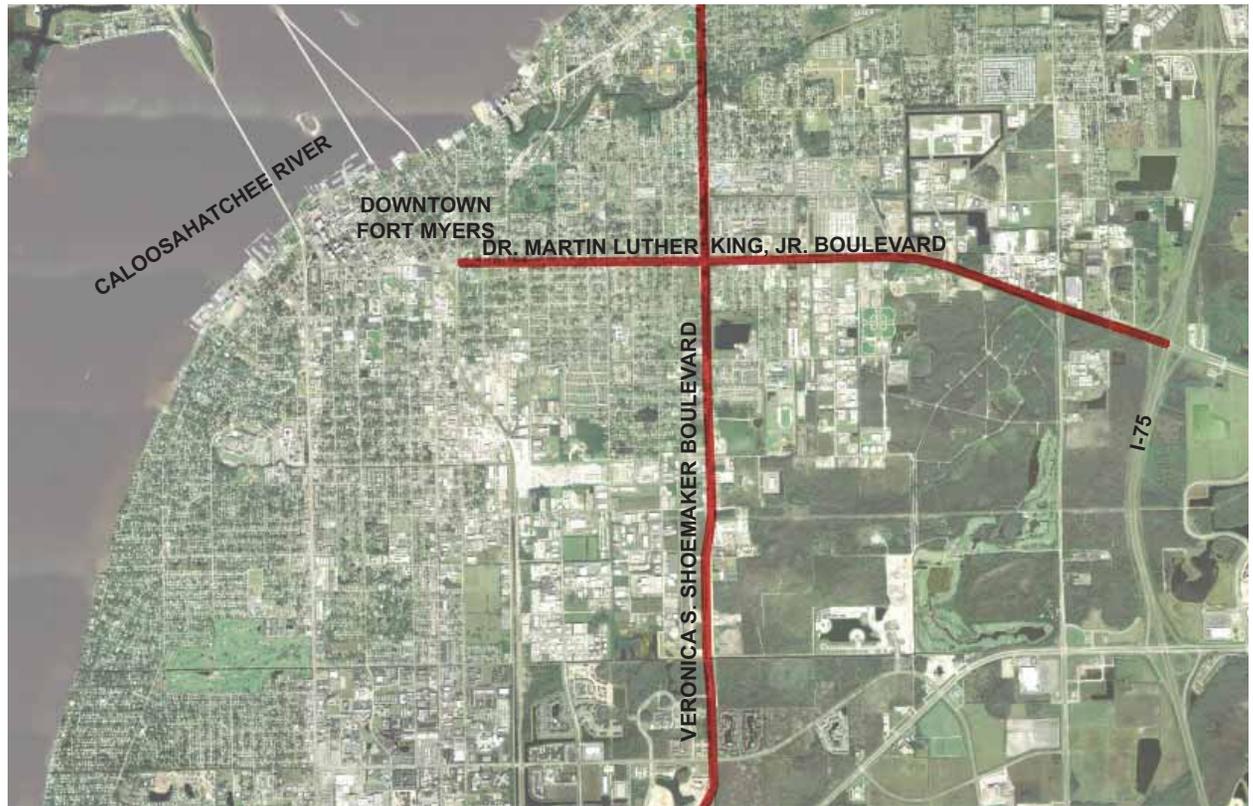
- Councilwoman Veronica S. Shoemaker
The News-Press, November 2, 2005

Communities need to work together to guide growth and assure quality development for future generations. The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard / Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard Revitalization Plan demonstrates this kind of teamwork.

The Revitalization Plan seeks to balance the needs of both vehicles and pedestrians while preserving and improving the culture and community character of Dunbar. In doing so, this document represents a cohesive plan for the future of the corridors. The plan details specific design solutions and a feasible implementation strategy.

In 2005 and 2006 the City of Fort Myers, along with the town planning firm of Dover, Kohl & Partners, worked together to create a plan for the redevelopment of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard.

The planning process for the corridors began with a review of all relevant previous plans and studies and a detailed analysis of the study area. This chapter details the analysis of the corridors and the community planning process; the chapters following describe the resulting plan and strategies for implementation.



Aerial view of the two corridors

ANALYSIS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard are major thoroughfares that serve as important connections in the regional transportation network, but more importantly, both corridors are embedded in the heart of the Dunbar community. Running east and west, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard goes from Interstate 75 to Downtown Fort Myers. Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard heads north – south from Palm Beach Boulevard to Colonial Boulevard. The study area defined for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard / Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard Revitalization Plan includes approximately 8 miles of

roadway and extends two blocks in all directions from each corridors.

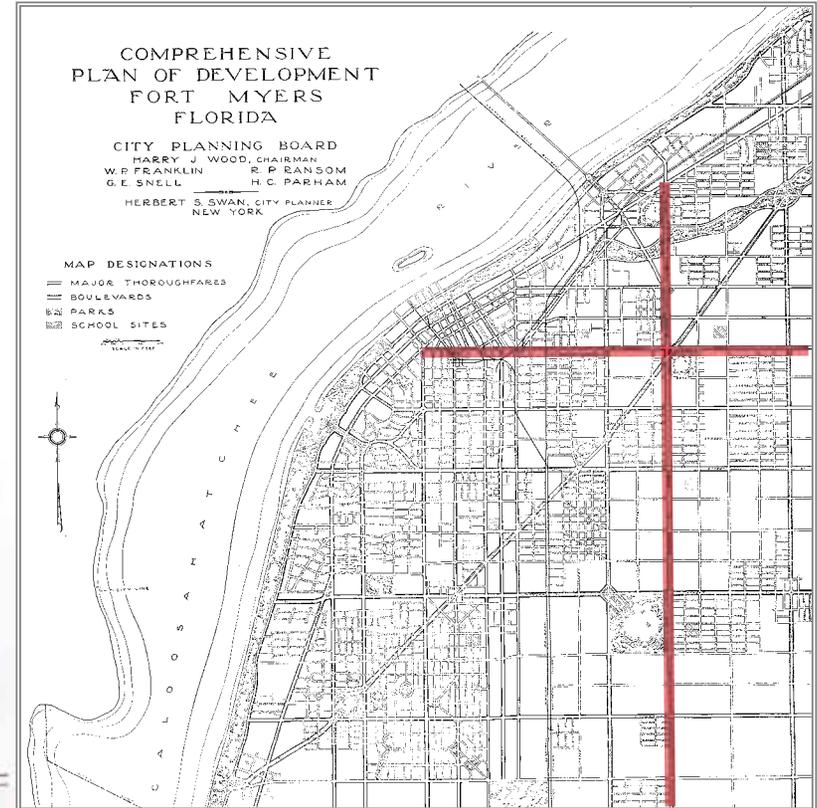
Realizing the importance of both corridors as transportation and community connectors, the city and Dunbar residents recognized the need to join together to create a comprehensive strategy for growth and redevelopment of the corridor. A comprehensive strategy for the future of these important corridors is needed to address their physical form and redevelopment, as well as to promote and preserve the community character of the Dunbar area.

STUDYING THE PAST

Prior to creating the plan for the future of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard, the planning team researched the history of the corridors by reviewing the city's and local residents' collections of historic maps and photographs. From its inception, Anderson Avenue, now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, has served as a primary transportation route connecting Downtown Fort Myers with the region. In addition to being a major transportation corridor, the roadway has served as a

centralizing element for African-American history and culture in Fort Myers. In its long history the corridor has been home to locally-owned African-American businesses, as well as a location for entertainment and cultural venues.

In addition to studying the history of these corridors, the planning team reviewed all previous plans and studies relative to the corridors and Dunbar community (see Appendix A).



The 1926 plan for Fort Myers by Herbert S. Swan shows Palmetto Avenue (now Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard) as a continuous road.



Anderson Avenue, looking west, World War II
Photo courtesy of the Southwest Florida Historical Society

DUNBAR / BELLE VUE ANNEXATION

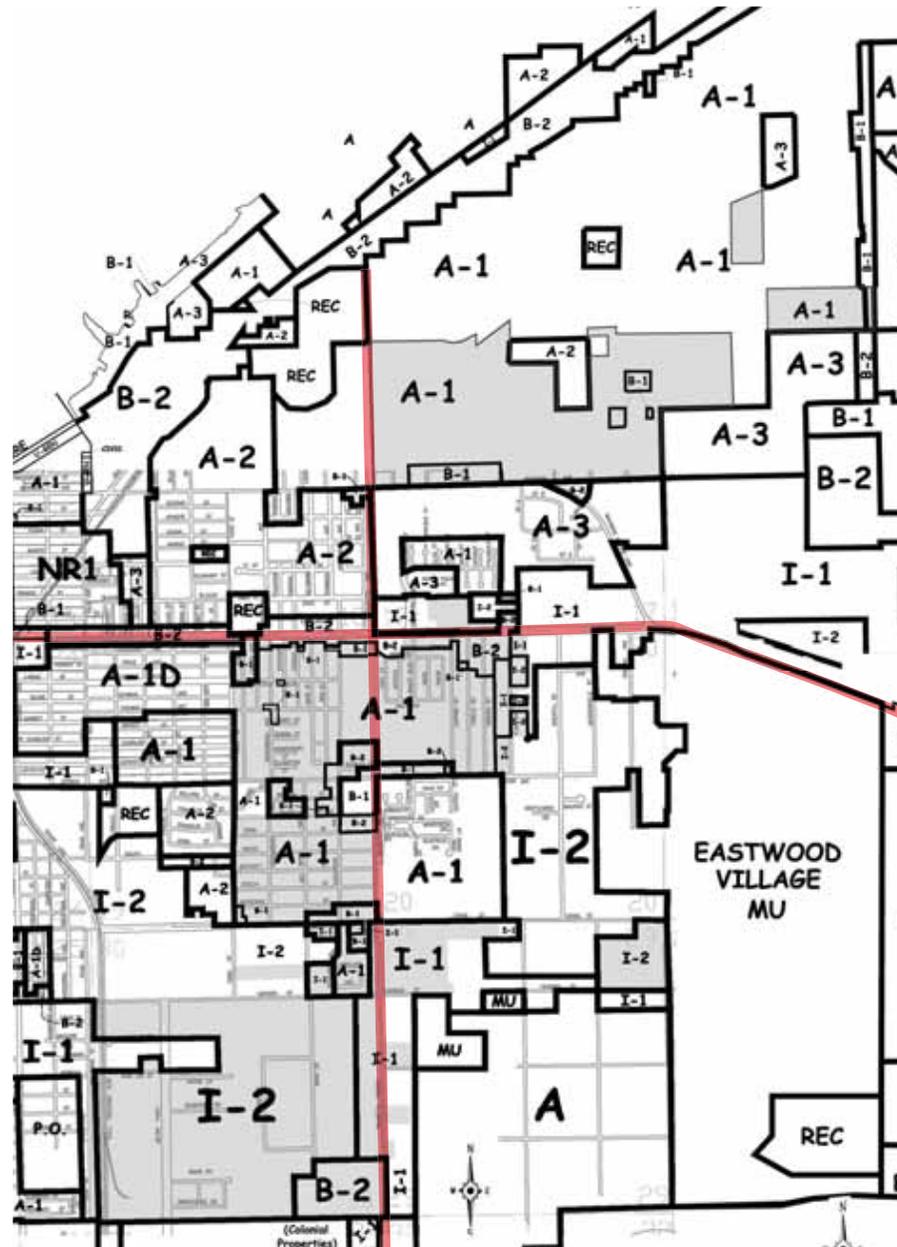
The entire study area is within the City of Fort Myers. However, a central portion, including nearly all of Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard south of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, became part of the city only recently. A small area known as Belle Vue, which lies immediately to the north of Michigan Avenue, was also annexed at that time.

For over 15 years, Lee County and city officials worked on details of annexing these unincorporated enclaves into the city. Under Florida law, annexations are fairly simple if a city and 100% of the landowners are in agreement. However, these enclaves were so large that it would have been impossible to achieve 100% agreement.

In 1998, the Florida legislature agreed to let Fort Myers annex these enclaves without the 100% requirement, provided the city and county agreed on the terms through an interlocal agreement and that residents of the enclaves supported the terms of that agreement in a referendum. The interlocal agreement was finalized in January of 2003. Voters approved the referendum on March 4 and annexation took effect on October 1, 2003.

Under terms of the interlocal agreement, essential services are being phased in over a five-year period. These include police, fire, code enforcement, sidewalks, street lighting, housing, potable water, wastewater, streets, solid waste, parks, and drainage.

In addition, the city agreed to amend its comprehensive plan to assign city land use designations to all annexed property. This was completed during 2004 and 2005. The map on this page shows the new designations (in the shaded gray areas) for land near Veronica S. Shoemaker and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevards (which are highlighted in red).



ANALYSIS OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard is an east-west thoroughfare that serves as the entrance to Fort Myers. The corridor, once known as Anderson Avenue, leads from the intersection of Interstate 75 to Downtown. Located on both sides of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (MLK) from Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard (VSS) to Cranford Avenue is the Dunbar neighborhood. Dunbar, named after the famous African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, is the historic center of the African-American community in Fort Myers.

On the western end of the corridor, properties along the road are typically one-story set close to the road. These buildings are a mixture of neighborhood commercial and residential buildings. Many of the structures were built in the 1950s and are in need of repair. The eastern end of MLK, from VSS to I-75, is a mixture of commercial and industrial buildings. The buildings are also one-story tall set back further from the street.

In 2002, the city and FDOT began a complete overhaul of MLK. The widening of MLK has improved aesthetics and traffic flow but has jeopardized the neighborhood fabric of the community. The absence of on-street parking, narrow sidewalks, and too few crosswalks, coupled with high vehicle travel speeds, makes the corridor feel unsafe for pedestrians.

Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard, named for Fort Myers Councilwoman Veronica S. Shoemaker, varies in character from residential to industrial buildings. The northern portion of the roadway is bordered by residential neighborhoods, High Tech Center, Alternative Learning Center, and Shady Oaks and Terry Park. The corridor also crosses Billy Creek, a tributary of the Caloosahatchee River. The southern portion opened for traffic in 2006. From Edison Avenue south to Colonial Boulevard mid-sized industrial facilities line the corridor. In recent years, multi-family residential units have been built along this portion of the corridor.



MLK West – McCollum Hall



MLK West – Imaginarium



MLK East – Fleamasters



MLK & VSS Intersection



VSS North – Michigan Avenue



VSS South – Winkler Avenue

SCALE COMPARISONS

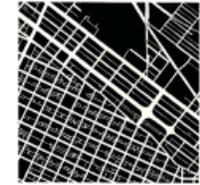
These scale comparisons helped the planners and community participants to better understand the scale of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Veronica S. Shoemaker Boulevard in relation to other memorable corridors and great places. Below are the corridors at the same scale as other well-known towns and corridors. The scale comparisons give light to the vast amount of large parcels available for redevelopment along the corridor, and make vivid the need to complete the street network as development occurs.



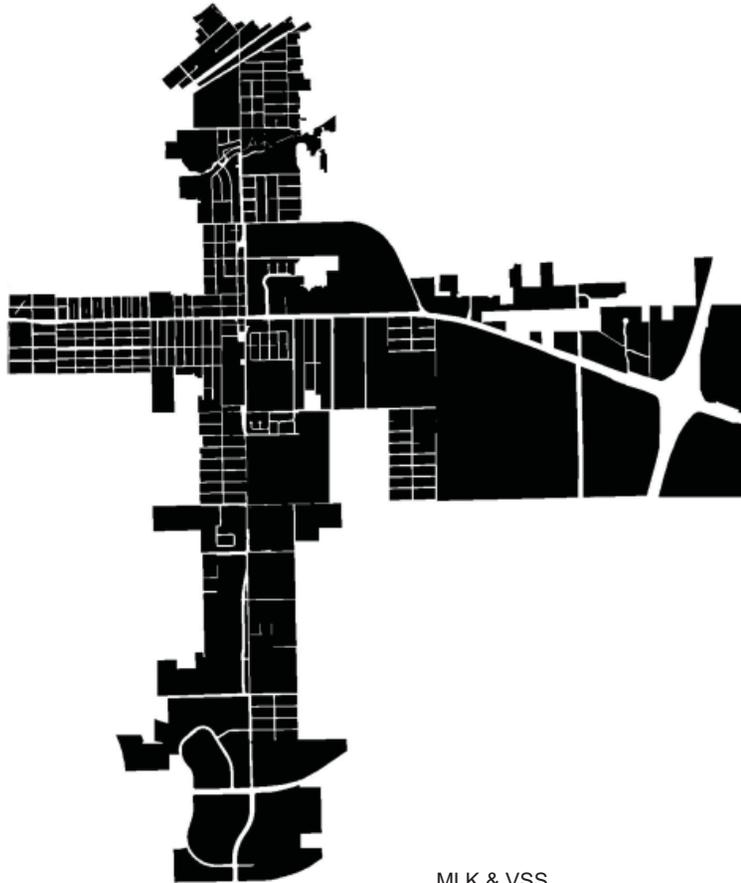
Historic Downtown
Fort Myers, FL



Downtown
Boston, MA



Monument Avenue
Richmond, VA



MLK & VSS
Fort Myers, FL



Saint Augustine, FL



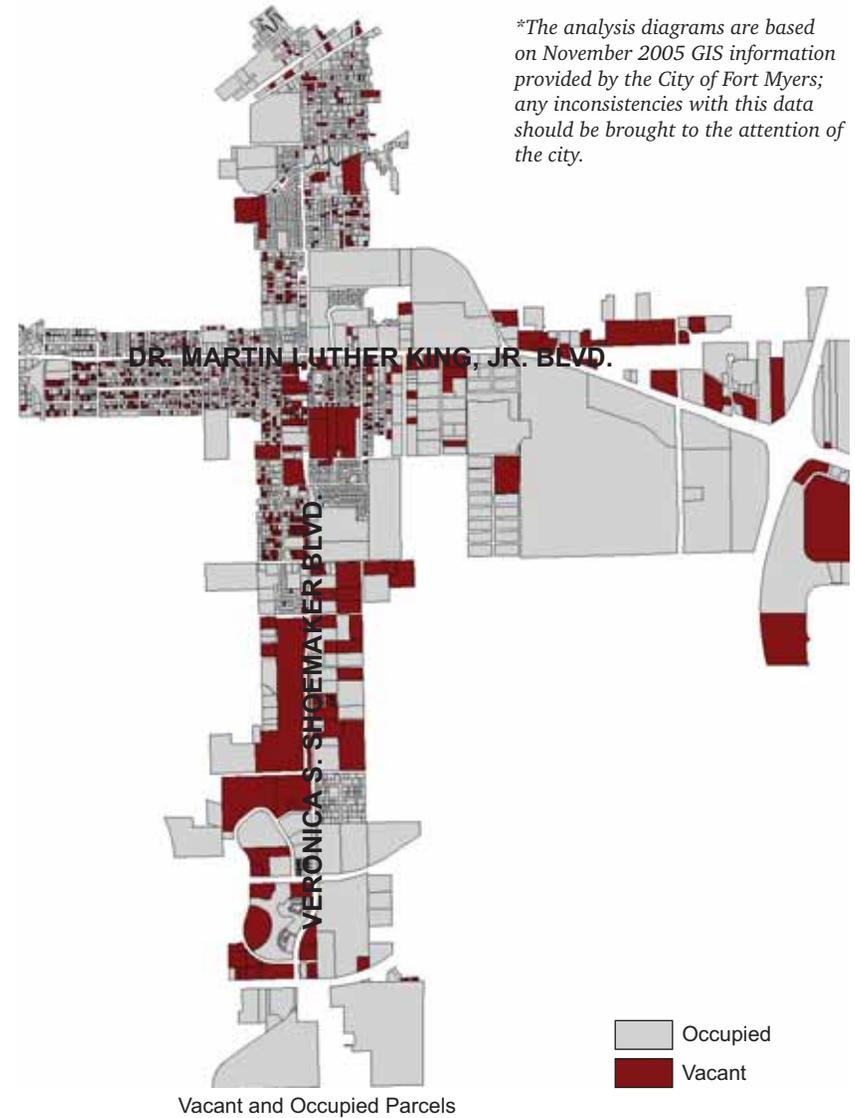
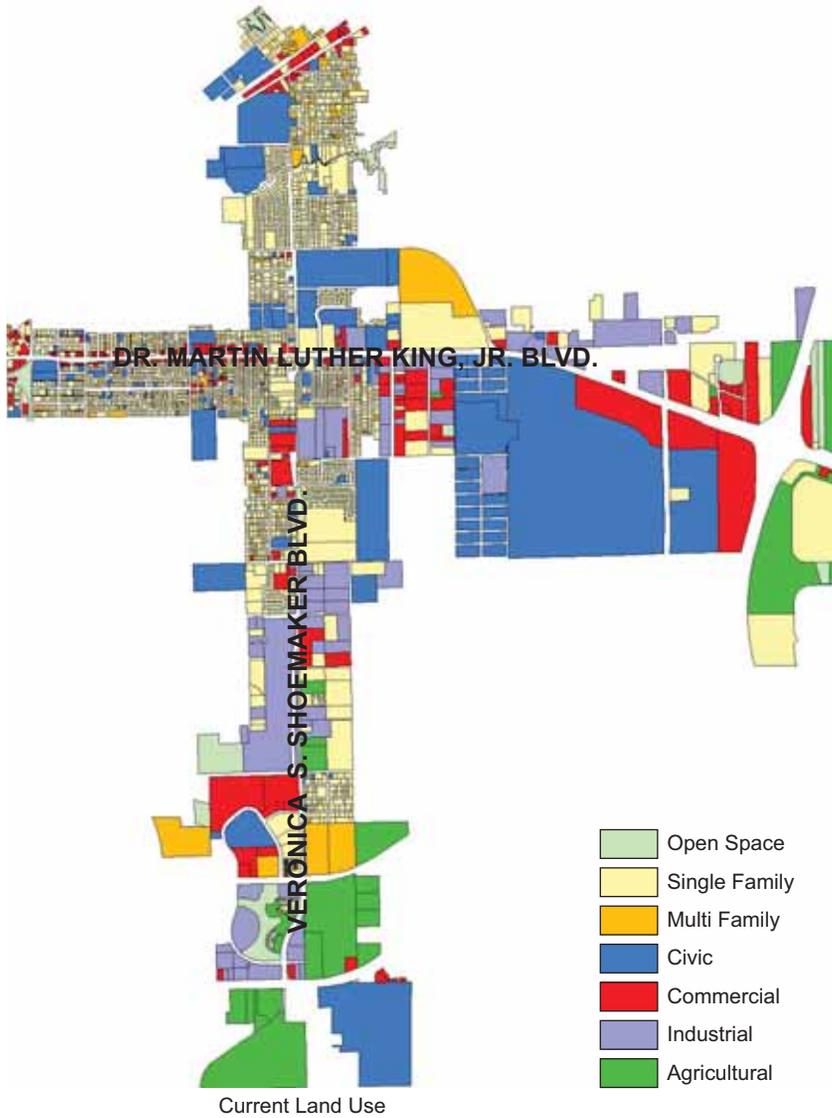
Miami Beach, FL



The Mall
Washington, DC

ANALYSIS DIAGRAMS*

Using the city's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data, the team created a series of analysis diagrams to better understand the dynamics of the planning area.



**The analysis diagrams are based on November 2005 GIS information provided by the City of Fort Myers; any inconsistencies with this data should be brought to the attention of the city.*

ANALYSIS DIAGRAMS, continued

