



cornerstones of the plan 4

A BOLD PLAN FOR A PROUD COMMUNITY

Through the charrette process, the community and design team arrived at a series of basic urban design and policy principles to guide the redevelopment of the MLK and VSS corridors. Shaped from input by Dunbar residents during the planning process, the “Cornerstones of the Plan” embody the citizenry’s vision for the future of these important corridors. The Cornerstones of the Plan summarize the results of the open planning process and promote responsible growth and development. The principles apply to MLK and VSS boulevards, but are also essential planning principles that should apply to the redevelopment of similar corridors in our region.

This chapter presents the broad scope of the community’s vision for MLK and VSS boulevards; specific design components of each principle are further described and illustrated in Chapter 5. General guidance on implementing each principle is included; detailed implementation strategies can be found in Chapter 6.

Cornerstones of the Plan

- Citizen Involvement In Every Step
- Complete, Walkable, People-first Neighborhoods
- Facing Streets & Making Great Addresses
- Mixed-income, Mixed-use, Mixed-design
- Showcase & Honor the Community Heritage
- Bring up the People With the Place

1. CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN EVERY STEP

The MLK and VSS Revitalization Plan was created based on input received from the community throughout the planning process. Residents and stakeholders— which included property owners, neighbors, business people, developers, elected officials, City staff, and community leaders— worked together to create a vision to guide future growth and assure quality development for generations of Dunbar residents.

Plans that get implemented are the ones where the people who created the plan remain involved and stay active. Citizens and leaders of Fort Myers will need to continue to work together confidently to make the MLK and VSS Revitalization Plan a built reality.

Implementation can prove to be a long and difficult endeavor, so Dunbar residents should pull together and become stewards of the plan. Public and private sectors, civic groups, residents, business owners, local government agencies and state government agencies must all work together to successfully implement the plan for the corridors. The formation of public-private partnerships will send a positive message to residents as well as people and businesses looking to relocate to the area.

The best plans are made by many hands.



Residents worked together during the hands-on session.



All generations stopped by the design studio to check on the progress.



The team and residents worked together to refine ideas.

2. COMPLETE, WALKABLE, PEOPLE-FIRST NEIGHBORHOODS

As cities grow, it is natural to add or fill-in existing neighborhoods and to build new neighborhoods. Whether completing an existing neighborhood or creating a new one, it is important to keep the entire neighborhood unit in mind – not just the creation of residential or industrial lots or office buildings, but complete neighborhoods that respond to everyday needs. A neighborhood contains not just houses, but a mix of uses that are adaptable for change over time. And houses aren't all the same size or style; many housing types occur on a variety of lot sizes and building types.

Walkable, safe streets are important to neighborhood character. “Great streets” are those that are walkable, accessible to all, interesting, comfortable, safe, and memorable. While great streets accommodate vehicular and pedestrian travel, they are also *signature public spaces*. Great streets showcase high quality buildings; mixed-use streets provide good addresses for sustainable commerce while residential streets are key to livability in neighborhoods. To achieve urban places that encourage (and thrive with) pedestrians, bicycles, and transit vehicles, the patterns of proposed development must be specified first, during the community planning stage. Then, balanced transportation plans can be crafted for both walkability and vehicular movement.

The key to walkable communities is creating neighborhoods with a true mix of uses within walking distance – not creating isolated areas solely for residential subdivisions, business uses, or civic uses. Dunbar must be a protected, cherished part of town that is continually improved with long-term care and planning.

Traditional neighborhoods:

1. *Have an identifiable center and edge.*
2. *Are of a walkable size.*
3. *Include a mix of land uses and building types.*
4. *Have an integrated network of walkable streets.*
5. *Reserve special sites for civic purposes.*



Complete neighborhoods include a mix of building types and pedestrian-friendly streets.

3. FACING STREETS & MAKING GREAT ADDRESSES

Over the course of the 20th century, the American home, like other aspects of our lives, has increasingly been designed around the automobile. Large garages have replaced porches as the dominant feature on the front of new homes, while parking lots have engulfed streetscapes. As a result, buildings no longer have the same desirable relationship to the street that they once did – they are increasingly hidden behind garages or placed in virtual seas of asphalt.

The fronts of buildings should include doors and windows, and not blank walls, making the street a more attractive and desirable place to be. Moreover, by bringing houses closer to the street, building porches, adding residential units above garages or stores, and promoting pedestrian activity will create more “eyes on the street.” “Eyes on the street” would help to mitigate against crime – making gates unnecessary. Finally, if each re-development project could follow this simple rule of buildings facing streets, it will add value to the public realm and enhance community character.



Houses built close to the street with porches or stoops facing the street help to promote “eyes on the street”.

Fort Myers, Florida

4. MIXED-INCOME, MIXED-USE, MIXED-DESIGN

To make MLK and VSS boulevards functional as they grow, it is important that the corridors support retail, housing, workplaces, green spaces, and civic uses. Mixing uses allows multiple destinations to be located within walking distance of homes, creating a walkable community and reducing the need to drive to other areas of town for daily needs. One of the most important advantages to mixed-use neighborhoods is the opportunity for a person to live close to his or her place of employment. When employees, regardless of income level, can live near their jobs, everyone benefits, for example:

- Residential property tax bases are strengthened
- Employees save time on their commutes
- Reduced congestion
- Stable workforce living near their employment
- Increased support for local businesses

Housing for a mix of incomes must be provided. A variety of building types allows for diverse lifestyle options and incomes to live in the same neighborhood. For example, in a shop front building, a business owner could live above his or her shop, or rent the upper floors as offices or apartments. Including affordable and market rate housing in same community creates a diverse neighborhood that is desirable to people of all ages and income levels.

Providing a mix of housing types requires some flexibility in the city’s thinking about land development, about density, and about how close together things are. The two corridors can serve as a place where the city can allow smart, sensible developments, including denser and moderately taller buildings. This revitalization can also be accomplished without unnecessarily displacing anyone. Great towns and neighborhoods have mixed-design where large and small buildings coexist and accom-

modate a variety of users while offering a mixture of architectural styles. It all adds up to an interesting variety of structures, that creates the character of a neighborhood. Sample building types and architectural styles are included in Appendix B.

By mixing the income, uses, and design, a complete neighborhood can be created and enjoyed by a diverse population.



Delray Beach, FL



Miami Beach, FL

5. SHOWCASE & HONOR THE COMMUNITY HERITAGE

In cities, new uses, social patterns, and economic activities emerge every decade, while others become outdated and get replaced, or transformed. This nonstop evolution of use and form is inevitable. By preserving and renewing historic buildings, the continuity and the evolution our society is improved. McCollum Hall is one example of a great building that could be restored to its former prominence and again be a community treasure.

In addition, efforts should be made to encourage the arts and culture of the community to thrive,

including creating new facilities to host cultural events. Clemente Park has the opportunity to emerge as an important community resource; the existing Black History Museum could be enhanced by other buildings with a mix of uses, including cultural arts facilities, neighborhood commercial businesses, and a community pool. Subsequently, Clemente Park would create a cultural oasis along MLK Boulevard.



McCollum Hall redeveloped as a vibrant neighborhood center along MLK Boulevard

6. BRING UP THE PEOPLE WITH THE PLACE

This Revitalization Plan was created through close cooperation with the Dunbar community. As revitalization takes place along the corridors, it is important that residents not be priced out of the area. This can be accomplished by creating a more upwardly mobile community while improving the physical attributes of the place.

Improved physical and economic conditions will provide many new opportunities to local residents:

- Those who own property will accumulate wealth as property values increase.
- Those of working age will have more job opportunities.
- Those pursuing business will have a more experienced workforce and more customers and clients.
- Parents will have better opportunities for their children than they had for themselves.

The revitalized Dunbar of tomorrow will be a better place for the people of Dunbar today.



Clemente Park should be designed to showcase the proud heritage of the Dunbar community