FEC Corridor Strategic Redevelopment Plan

Streetscape
Open Space and
Recreation Assessment

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Study Boundaries

FEC Corridor Boundaries:
- Northern Boundary: NE-W 79th Street
- Southern Boundary: NE-W 14th Street
- Western Boundary: Interstate 95
- Eastern Boundary: Biscayne Boulevard (Highway US1)
FEC Corridor Strategic Redevelopment Plan

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Introduction:

The FEC Corridor can be characterized as an economically distressed inner-city redevelopment area. The project boundaries for the FEC Strategic Redevelopment Plan are 79th Street to the north; Biscayne Boulevard to the east; 14th Street to the south; and Interstate 95 to the west. The plan also considered Edgewater east of Biscayne Boulevard to the Bay; the bordering Omni and Overtown neighborhoods to the south; and, the larger FEC Corridor to the north and west of the study area.

Within the corridor there are three neighborhood sub-areas: Wynwood, Edgewater, and Little Haiti. While each sub-area has a different economic, racial and ethnic make-up, their streetscape conditions differ very little. Although the area is full of potential, streetscape deficiencies are consistent throughout most of the study area. The FEC Corridor also presents a challenging opportunity for open space and recreation development. Absent vast expanses of undeveloped vacant lots, the edges of rivers, canals, waterfronts, abandoned rail alignments, and utility corridors are clearly conducive to open space and recreation development and are likely to insure a high level of utilization.

Streetscape:

The Streetscape assessment examines the FEC Corridor Area using a series of criteria derived from a current literature review on the subject. Because the same problems are consistent throughout the entire corridor, this assessment will define and examine each condition affecting the FEC Corridor without reference to specific sub-areas.

This assessment is intended to elucidate the potential of each sub-area for developing a unique character, reflective of its economic and social make-up. Additionally, it will build a foundation for future site-specific analyses, and provide information on criteria necessary for the future development of the area.
Methodology:

This Streetscape Assessment studies the character-giving elements of the area. It is substantiated by a literature review on the subjects of streets, streetscape planning/design, and urban planning/design. Initially, an inventory of existing visual conditions was compiled through an on-site examination. These existing conditions were then examined with reference to criteria extracted from the literature review to produce an assessed value for the conditions present in the area. Finally, these examinations suggest development of opportunities that may enhance the streetscape conditions of the area. The following is a list of the perspectives that were utilized to assess the existing streetscapes:

- Overall Street-Corridor Conditions
- Architectural Conditions
- Sidewalk Conditions
- Parking Conditions
- Street Conditions
- Vegetation Conditions
- Overall Aesthetic Conditions
- Safety Conditions
**Condition 1: The Overall Street-Corridor**

The street-corridor conditions have many aspects that will be detailed in sections that follow, such as sidewalk culture, architectural interaction with the street, overall character of the area, etc. In this section, the assessment will primarily address the issue of overall scale.

The interaction between the street and building scales is important in defining the spatial characteristic of the street corridor. A more defined street corridor increases the public’s perception of the corridor’s spatial characteristics.\(^1\) Wide streets with a low building height profile produce a sense of emptiness and of uninhabitable spatial spread. Conversely, narrow streets with extremely tall building profiles produce a sense of claustrophobia, tightness, over-enclosure and constriction that deprive a corridor of sunlight and ample air circulation. Typically, a good average relative scale between the corridor and the building profiles is of equal proportion, or 1:1.\(^2\) This proportional relationship provides a spatial definition of enclosure for the street-corridor, while allowing ample sunlight and air circulation to penetrate the perceived space.

The community had expressed through the community response meetings that they would like to require height restrictions, possibly a 10-story maximum height.

**Existing Conditions**

Throughout most of the FEC Corridor study area, there are three primary north-south corridors. These are Biscayne Boulevard (US1), NE 2\(^{nd}\) Avenue, and Miami Avenue. With the exception of a few locations along Biscayne Boulevard, spatial definition along these street-corridors is very poor.

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North Biscayne Boulevard – Highway US1:

- Along the Biscayne Boulevard street-corridor, the building façades range from single story buildings up to 5-stories. The width of the street-corridor varies throughout, usually occupying no less than 50 feet, allowing for four traffic lanes and sidewalks on both sides.

East 2nd Avenue

- Along the East 2nd Avenue corridor, the building heights range mostly between one and two stories. Taller buildings are mostly within the vicinity of the corridor’s intersection with North 79th Street.

North Miami Avenue

- Along the North Miami Avenue corridor, the building heights are predominantly single-story; mostly as a result of the overall residential land-use in the area.

- The street corridors are disproportionately wide when compared to adjacent building heights.

- The lack of street definition is further enforced by the adjacency of vacant lots and deep setbacks in front of the streets and sidewalks. The inconsistencies in the heights of buildings along the corridors deprive the areas of a sense of scale and further detract from their spatial definition.
Opportunities

- There is an opportunity to establish consistency and standards in building heights throughout the corridor that will help define and maintain a proper spatial perception.

- There is an opportunity to establish standard setbacks that are uniform throughout an area and are in relationship with land-use.

- There is an opportunity to take advantage of the presence of three major North-South thoroughfares to evenly redistribute traffic, and allowing for future construction of medians to aid street scales.

- Where disproportionate street scales exist, there is an opportunity to use landscaping and tree plantings to resolve the spatial problems.
**Condition 2: Architecture**

Architectural conditions are possibly the most noticeable of the elements that provide a character to an area. They include the following elements:

- Overall Color Scheme
- Prevalent Architectural Vocabulary
- Sidewalk Architectural Features

These elements begin to create the ambiance and “experience” of areas, and in turn spark the development of uniqueness and character that make them “successful” pleasant places to live and work. An example of this in South Florida is the Art Deco District in Miami Beach’s South Beach area. Together, the elements listed above, working in conjunction with other factors, help to create and consolidate a sense of place.

**Existing Conditions**

- Throughout the entire FEC corridor, color schemes are unremarkable. Buildings are predominantly colored either in pastels or earth tones, made popular by both South Beach’s Art Deco District and by the City of Coral Gables. Commercial buildings, institutional buildings and industrial warehouses tend to be painted pale whites, beiges and grays, while most of the livelier colors are found in residential units.
Architectural styles vary from block to block and include a wide array of examples from MiMo, Florida Vernacular, Classic, Old Spanish, Cottage-style, Contemporary, Art Deco, and Post-modern Architecture. Most of the MiMo and Art Deco buildings are concentrated along the Biscayne Corridor, along with many Contemporary and Post-modern examples. The quainter Old Spanish, Florida Vernacular and Cottage-style examples are found in the more residential areas and along North 2nd Avenue and North Miami Avenue.

There are no sidewalk architectural features, such as fountains, planters or corner meeting areas. No architectural vocabulary dominates throughout the area of study. However, some buildings that have upper floors overhanging the sidewalk, providing covered protected space for pedestrians.

Opportunities

There is an opportunity to designate the exceptional examples of each present architectural style as landmarks and protecting them against demolition. This would provide the area of study with a sense of history and a perception of permanence.
• There is an opportunity to develop predominant color-schemes and architectural vocabularies for each of the distinct neighborhoods of Edgewater, Wynwood, and Little Haiti. This would provide for an overall distinction between the three areas and would reflect each neighborhood’s qualities, predominant cultural heritage, uniqueness and identity.

• There is an opportunity to provide sidewalk architectural features that would allow for safety at corner crosswalks, help define the edges of neighborhoods and provide pedestrians with safety zones and meeting places along the street.

• Sidewalk architectural features can serve as reservoirs for the use of public art. These would further enhance the character of each neighborhood.

• There is an opportunity to extend existing overhang conditions in zones projected for heavy pedestrian activity.
Condition 3: Sidewalks

Sidewalk conditions are possibly the most important element of a total streetscape. They are comprised of many elements, including:

- Paving Patterns
- Sidewalk Zoning
- Street Furniture
- Curb Conditions

These elements are the primary contributors to the development of a sidewalk culture. They define the manner in which pedestrians will interact with the street, the commercial establishments along the street and with other pedestrians. They serve to enhance the perception of place, identity and culture. In many cases, the sum presence of these elements creates a successful design that serves to invigorate and stimulate pedestrian activity along a street.\(^3\)

Paving Patterns

Paving patterns serve to inform pedestrians about designated areas for different functions and direction. Their complexity serves to provide interest as well as affecting the speed of pedestrian activity: an important factor to consider for street-side commercial establishments that hope to lure customers with window displays. Their colors, textures and patterns can provide pedestrians with a sense of place, working in conjunction with architectural conditions and strengthening the efficacy of the overall design.\(^4\)

Sidewalk Zoning

Sidewalk zoning is the designation of specific “zones” or areas within the sidewalk environment. Pedestrian zones, commercial-use zones and

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\(^4\) ibid., 51.
street furniture zones allow for multiple and varied functions of the sidewalk to occur simultaneously and without interruption. The effective implementation of sidewalk zoning, coupled with the commercial activity and pedestrian presence, serve to activate the area, making the sidewalk a place of destination instead of only transport.\textsuperscript{5}

\textbf{Street Furniture}

Street furniture is tangible evidence of pedestrian use of the sidewalk space. It includes benches, planters, trash receptacles, etc. These elements add to the character of the area, while providing functions and uses by pedestrians.\textsuperscript{6}

- Benches provide habitation on the sidewalk, by supplying a resting place for pedestrians. When located alongside the curb, they also provide protection from vehicular traffic.

- Bus stops also provide places of habitation, but most importantly, they serve to demarcate major intersections where heavy pedestrian activity may be expected. Their design also contributes to the overall character of the area.

- Bicycle racks allow for access to the area by cyclists. The incorporation of cyclists as a user group helps to accommodate people who would rather ride their bicycles from neighboring areas, alleviating vehicular traffic. In addition, cyclists add another dimension to the number of activities that help make a street viable.

\textsuperscript{5} ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{6} ibid., 40.
• Horse racks allow for access to the area by horse riders. Racks are crucially important for horseback-mounted police patrols. Several downtowns across the United States, including Miami, have implemented Mounted Police units. Their presence helps to provide a sense of security for the area’s users and visitors. The benefits of horses or bicycles over patrol vehicles are numerous, principally the flexibility of moving through an active area with ease when an emergency arises.

• Bollards provide protection for pedestrians, while limiting vehicular traffic. When used around a corner’s curb, bollards help protect pedestrians waiting to cross the street from vehicles attempting to bend the curve at a smaller radius than the street itself.

• Trash receptacles help to keep the areas clean. It is proven that when present, a majority of the pedestrians will use trash receptacles. The adherence to their use by pedestrians is so strong, that when full to capacity, in the majority of cases, people will dump trash next to the trash receptacles.

• Planters provide opportunities to designate zoned areas, provide protection from vehicular traffic, help beautify the sidewalk areas and are typically low maintenance.

• Telephone booths at corners allow for communication for individuals who need public facilities when away from their homes.

• Street signage informs pedestrians of where they are, and helps to define the individuality of neighborhoods.
• Street maps placed at corners provide pedestrians with information as well as encourage visitors to explore the mapped district.

• Sidewalk canopies provide protection against the over-powering summer sun and shield against rain, thus helping to promote uninterrupted activity along the sidewalk areas.

• Streetlights illuminate pathways, create drama and interest with light and color and provide pedestrians with a sense of security. There are two types of streetlights: streetlights that illuminate the street help to prevent vehicular-pedestrian accidents; and streetlights that illuminate the sidewalk to create ambiance and provide a perception of security by clearly displaying the surroundings.

• Corner gathering areas provide for group activity along the sidewalk. They provide areas where people watching, a phenomenon exploited by shopping malls and urban gathering areas, can occur, or where street vendors can establish small commercial activities.

• Water features and corner landmarks help define location and place within an area. They help inform pedestrians about the end of a commercial strip, a change in land-use, or a transition from one neighborhood to another.

• Emergency call boxes provide pedestrians with access to emergency help when needed, and serve as landmarks and reference points for visitors.

• Parking meters, while providing the City with revenue, can double as protective elements to prevent vehicular-pedestrian accidents.
• Curbs provide the pedestrian with an important protection tool against the possibility of vehicular accidents. Curbs are, in fact, the first line of defense for the pedestrian against traffic. Their conditions help define the edge of the sidewalk and the beginning of the street. Changes in curb elevations accommodate pedestrians with disabilities.

**Existing Conditions**

• An overwhelming majority of the sidewalks within each sub-area are without character, in most cases, a strip of poured concrete slab. Many of these bland sidewalks are uneven as a result of underlying tree root structures or have deteriorated from a lack of maintenance. These deplorable conditions inhibit use by individuals with disabilities and generally deter pedestrians.

• There are instances of attempts to introduce interest “into” the sidewalk. In one area of Wynwood, inlaid mosaics adorn certain sidewalks, providing an element of surprise for pedestrians. In the Design District there are corners treated with brick pavers, providing the pedestrian with a terminus for the street block.

• Most of the sidewalks are too narrow to allow for other than pedestrian activity to occur on them.
• Along the sidewalks in the vicinity of North 79th Street, commercial stores presently use the sidewalk for the outdoor display of their merchandise. While this is beneficial for commerce, the sidewalks are too narrow to accommodate both product display and pedestrian activity.

• In most areas, the sidewalk is separated from the street side curb by a 4 to 5 foot planting area.

• Most of the planting areas between the curb and the sidewalk are either sod or over-powered by weeds.

• The typical Metro bus bench is unprotected from climatic conditions and provides no cultural or aesthetic character. This is characteristic of transit stops in the study area.

• Trash receptacles are present but sparsely placed throughout the areas.

• Telephone booths are well situated in some areas, however, according to residents, end up being used as points of sale for drug traffickers and prostitutes.

• The signage that designates the streets and avenues at their intersections are the typical street signs found throughout Miami-Dade County. In some cases, these signs have not been maintained or have been damaged by vehicular collision and not repaired.
• Street banners are present in the Design District and in the Wynwood neighborhood’s light industrial areas. The present condition of these signs is deplorable. The paint, subject to climatic conditions and without maintenance, is faint and at times illegible.

• Sidewalk canopies are few among the commercial establishments. Most of the canopies extend 2-3 feet beyond the front façade of the buildings, their colors and styles varying without order.

• The predominant type of streetlight present in the area is the vehicular streetlight. Many pedestrian pathways need residential lighting to help illuminate the way.

• Parking meters are mainly found in the Design District. Elsewhere in the planning area, they are few or non-existent.

• Almost all of the corner intersections are “ADA accessible,” with only a few exceptions. They are not uniformly maintained and their conditions vary accordingly.

Opportunities

• There is an opportunity to extend the use of inlaid mosaics in sidewalks throughout the area, providing each neighborhood with different symbols to enhance its identity.

• There is an opportunity to enhance the definition of corners as edges by using different pavers throughout the areas.
• There is an opportunity to design paving patterns that will be unique to each neighborhood, providing interest for the pedestrian, a sense of place, and an overall sense of design.

• There is an opportunity to develop a relationship between the paving patterns and outdoor uses by commercial establishments.

• There is an opportunity to extend sidewalk width by eliminating the extended sod-planted areas, thus eliminating the need for maintenance, irrigation and fertilization.

• By expanding the sidewalk, commercial use of zoning spaces becomes viable and will allow commerce, such as restaurants, cafes and the like, to use the sidewalks for a variety of activities.
Condition 4: Parking

Parking conditions are important for providing parking solutions that do not impede or obstruct pedestrian activity, that are safe for vehicular drivers and that promote commercial activity. Elements of parking conditions include:

- Curb Conditions
- Parking Meters
- Designated Parking Areas
- Lighting
- Parking Methods.

Curb Conditions
Curbs provide pedestrians with important protection against the possibility of vehicular accidents. Curbs are, in fact, the first line of defense against traffic for the pedestrian. Their condition helps define the edge of the sidewalk and the beginning of the street. Changes in curb elevations accommodate pedestrians with disabilities.7

Parking Meters
Parking meters, while providing the City with revenue, can double as protective elements to prevent vehicular-pedestrian accidents. In addition, parking meters serve as signals that inform vehicle owners of legitimate parking opportunities.

Designated Parking Areas
Designated parking areas provide vehicular owners with a sense of security that those parking areas are either patrolled or frequented by other vehicular drivers. Designated parking spaces allow for an appropriate number of spaces to be allocated for a sustainable number of vehicles.
Lighting

Good lighting is possibly the most important element in creating a perception of safety among the users and pedestrians of an area. While proper illumination lessens the likelihood of pedestrian-vehicular accidents, it also provides the vehicle owner with a sense of security.

Parking Methods

Parking methods, if not well planned, can have a detrimental effect on pedestrians crossing the street. Parking vehicles parallel to the curb, typical street-side parking, allows for ease of penetration by the pedestrians into the street. Angled, drive-in parking along the curb impedes and deters pedestrian movement across the street. Parking should never be taken to the corners to allow a safe area for pedestrians while waiting for an opportunity to cross the street.

Existing Conditions

- Good parking conditions exist throughout the Design District and along sections of Biscayne Boulevard.
- Most parking areas throughout the area of study are unused.
- There is a high incidence of street-side parking in front of residential homes, many with poor curb conditions or with no existing curbs.
- Good lighting is scarce. It is however, sparingly found in the Design District and along Biscayne Boulevard.

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- Parking areas in Little Haiti, along NE 2nd Ave, and along Biscayne Boulevard, that front commercial establishments, frequently encroach on sidewalk space, reducing it at times to as little as 12 inches in width.

Opportunities

- There is an opportunity to provide ample parking throughout the entire area of study.

- Vacant lots provide opportunities for parking garages that will have security, controlled entry, and reduce the impact of parking vehicles along the street.
Condition 5: Streets

Street conditions provide for the safe transport of vehicular traffic, while allowing for safe crossing by pedestrians. Elements that play a role in street conditions include:

- Crosswalks
- Pavement Conditions
- Medians
- Traffic Controllers

Crosswalks

Crosswalks designate safe zones for pedestrians to cross the street. Crosswalk boundaries should be painted and well defined. Methods of making distinctions include simple painting of crosswalk boundaries, hatching the crosswalk with painted lines, or adding a paving pattern that creates an extension of the sidewalk into the street.8

Pavement Condition

The condition of the pavement laid on the roadway is very important. If the pavement has holes or is worn, it increases the risk of vehicular accidents, and the chances for drivers to lose control and invade the sidewalk areas.

Medians

Medians help to prevent head-on vehicular collisions. Where present, they also serve as mid-point safe havens when trying to cross wide roads. In addition, medians provide an opportunity for vegetation and beautification of the street. The use of adequate vegetation can help resolve the problematic spatial conditions posed by wide streets.
Traffic Controllers

The best traffic controllers, other than stop signs and traffic lights are sidewalk activity and the complexity of streetscape design. High pedestrian activity along a street will catch and hold a driver’s attention. As a result, traveling speeds are reduced. Complex streetscape compositions have similar effects on drivers. Detailed and articulate streetscapes increase drivers’ perception of speed as they drive through the corridor, thus compelling them to slow down.9

Existing Conditions

• In most cases, crosswalks are non-existent or deteriorated throughout the area of study.

• Along most of Biscayne Boulevard, the pavement is in fair condition with only minor need of repair.

• Pavement along East 2nd Avenue and Miami Avenue is quite deteriorated from use by trucks traveling between the Port of Miami and the FEC Buena Vista container storage yard.

• There are few medians along the three major north-south thoroughfares.

• There are some medians along principal west-east streets, mostly those that have ramps onto Interstate 95.

9 Ibid., 295.
• There is little evidence of good traffic control beyond traffic lights and street signage.

• Sterile, blank walls of industrial warehouses funnel vision and make drivers more prone to travel at faster speeds.

Opportunities

• There is an opportunity to utilize pavers and colors in crosswalks to add a sense of character to intersections.

• There is an opportunity to create traffic-user routes, through-routes and localized traffic routes that will alleviate the heavy traffic along Biscayne Boulevard and add medians along the major north-south thoroughfares.

• There is a need to repair and keep a maintenance schedule for the pavement of all of the roads.

• There is a need to create a lower impact solution for the routes that trucks take between the Port and the container storage yard.

• There is a need for medians along the north-south corridors to facilitate pedestrian crossings.

• There is a need to slow down traffic along the roads to make it safe and inviting for pedestrians to use the sidewalks.
Condition 6: Vegetation

Vegetation conditions within a street corridor provide a naturalistic experience while helping to protect pedestrians from vehicular mishaps and climatic conditions. The presence of vegetation is a major factor in achieving beauty and in establishing both boundaries between the street space and the sidewalk space. Further, it aids in providing traffic control by increasing drivers’ perception of speed, forcing them to slow down. Elements that contribute to an overall vegetation condition include:

- Street Trees
- Median Trees
- Shrubs
- Groundcovers

Street Trees

Street trees interact with pedestrians in many ways. They provide places of respite and of protection. Trees provide shade, a sense of civic beauty and of pride. Trees help provide an overall sense of well-being for pedestrians and drivers and serve as an attraction for people to return to the area. In addition, street trees help resolve spatial problems within the corridor by altering proportions in favorable ways. Most importantly, street trees provide habitat for wildlife, such as birds, that add an additional character of liveliness to the complexity of the street corridor.¹⁰

Median Trees

Median trees serve similar functions to street trees, but their benefits are more tangible for drivers. Median trees protect cars from each other when traveling in opposite directions. They provide a secure, shaded area where pedestrians can wait to cross the street if they have only made it

half way. Lastly, median trees add to the overall sense of civic beauty and pride.11

Shrubs and Groundcovers

Shrubs and groundcovers offer pedestrians and drivers with elements of interest along the corridor. They provide texture and color that is in direct relationship to the human scale of the pedestrian. They are evidence of season and time, while also providing fragrance and overall beauty to the street habitat.

Existing Conditions

• There are few streets with street trees.

• Many of the existing trees alongside the corridors are the result of sporadic tree planting.

• Trees are predominantly either the native Mahogany Tree, *Swietenia Mahogoni*, or the Royal Palm, *Roystonea Elata*.

• Biscayne Boulevard has the most varied tree planting of the three major north-south thoroughfares.

• There are more trees on west-east corridors than on north-south corridors.

11 ibid., 95.
Opportunities

- There is an opportunity to develop a scheme where tree species relate to a sense of direction.

- There is an opportunity to draw on the historical presence of a Royal Palm Alley along Biscayne Boulevard to provide a sense of historical pride.

- There is an opportunity to use different tree types to demarcate edges between neighborhoods and at major intersections.

- There is an opportunity to use street trees as a vegetative connection between parks and open spaces.

- There is an opportunity for a varied use of different street trees to provide diverse habitats for different types of wildlife.

- There is an opportunity to use shrubs and groundcovers to add texture, color and character to the different neighborhoods.
Condition 7: Overall Aesthetics

The overall aesthetic condition of an area seeks to describe the presence of a predominant character that is distinguishable in the area. This character is a result of the presence of many of the previous conditions, in addition to unique conditions, such as culture and ethnicity, which have not been previously described.

Existing Conditions

- The overall aesthetic conditions of the area of study vary. Areas closer to the Bay have a tendency to have better streetscape conditions and maintenance. Blighted, deserted areas with overgrown yards, no trees, clutter and trash characterize the areas closer to I-95. The area bordering the southern edge of the Little River is a noticeable example. This area’s mishaps are exaggerated by its juxtaposition to the neighboring City of Miami Shores to the north, across the narrow Little River, with its pristine front lawns, well-manicured gardens, well-maintained building façades, and abundant, ordered vegetation.

- The study area, in general, has no predominant character that helps to create and define neighborhoods and a sense of place.

- Visual clutter is a major problem for the area of study. Billboards and aboveground utilities clutter the view and add to the overall present sense of danger. Possibly the most abundant type of clutter is fences. They tend to vary in
height, material and scale, abutting the sidewalk pavement. They deprive pedestrians of a sense of openness and approachability and give the area an overwhelming character of defense, anonymity, and of deprivation.

- The presence of the Buena Vista Yard creates a series of conditions that need to be addressed. Among these are: visual clutter, noise pollution, and a perception of blight.

- There is no predominant evidence of the demographic, cultural presence of the various ethnic groups within the elements that comprise the streetscape.

Opportunities

- There is a great opportunity to involve the community in design review issues through a design review board. By creating such a community-based entity, members of the communities and neighborhoods develop a sense of proprietorship and of belonging to the area. This, in turn, triggers growth in the realm of community pride and helps to further develop the unique qualities of each neighborhood based on its predominant cultural heritages. In addition, community associations and crime watch programs help to solidify an involvement of active members in the community.

- There is an opportunity to create a sense of place and uniqueness by capitalizing on the cultural differences that exist in each sub-area.
Condition 8: Safety

Security Needs

- There is an evident need for security throughout the area. This perception of danger is visible in the protective measures people take to guard their properties. Entire communities East of Biscayne Boulevard have joined together to close streets, create guarded entryways, and have created community watch groups to provide security. Residential and commercial areas within the more blighted zones have protective fencing and bars on windows. Commercial establishments use shutters or bars on their window displays for security.

- The community has mentioned numerous times about the need for better police patrol and safer conditions in the area.

- Ways to increase perceptions of security in the area through the use of streetscape include:
  
  - Providing uses and activities that bring people to the area
  - Easier access and manageability of the area by police
  - Extensive use of proper lighting
  - Addition of emergency call boxes at street corners
  - Widening of sidewalks
  - Fencing-off and barricading desolate vacant lots abutting sidewalks
  - Maintaining clear visual areas beneath tree canopy and above shrubs for clearer visibility
  - Maintaining clean, trash-free, open intersections
  - Increasing street-side commercial activity that will bring more people to the area and keep it from being desolate
Open Space and Recreation:

Methodology

Open space and recreation areas offer opportunities to overcome many of the undesirable impacts on community cohesion. They help structure a re-emergence of ecological vitality, define a new urban aesthetic and contribute significantly to the aesthetic quality and physical order of our urban environment.¹²

The Open Space and Recreation Assessment evaluates additional character-giving elements of the study area. The analysis is substantiated by a literature review on the subjects of open space and recreation, greenways, landscape ecology and urban planning/design. The existing open space and recreation areas, and vacant lots were determined through a query of the 1998 Land Use data provided by City of Miami GIS database. An inventory of existing visual conditions was compiled through on-site visits. These existing conditions were then examined with criteria extracted from the literature review to result in an assessed value for the different existing conditions that are present in the area. Finally, these examinations lead to the development of a list of recommended opportunities that may enhance the open space and recreation potential of the area.

The following is a list of the conditions that were utilized to assess the existing open space and recreation of the FEC Corridor:

- Existing Park conditions
  - Safety
  - Aesthetics
  - Recreation facilities
  - Transportation/ network

• Vacant Lots
• FEC Right-of-way
• Little River
• Potential Recreation Activities
• Wildlife
• Streetscapes

**Existing Park conditions:**
Public spaces are land resources owned by local taxpayers. Among these public properties are parks, schools, public institutions, fire halls, libraries, and street and rail right-of-ways. The design and maintenance of these public spaces produce a significant impact on the quality of the visual landscape. These public spaces or landscapes set the tone for the development of private spaces.¹³

Public open spaces and recreation facilities are scattered throughout the FEC Corridor Study area. Notable parks include: Wynwood’s Roberto Clemente Park located at NW 2nd Avenue and NE 34th Street; Williams Park located at NW 17th Street and NW 5th Avenue; Dorsey Park located at NW 17th Street and NW 1st Avenue; and Little Haiti’s Edison Center Park located at NW 5th Court and NW 62nd Street.

Open space and recreation uses within the FEC Corridor study area are minimal, and with few exceptions, pedestrian connectivity is non-existent. The issue of
connectivity also applies to open space and recreation resources outside the study area, including Morningside Bayfront Park and Margaret Pace Park to the east along Biscayne Bay, and the Little River bends through 79th Street and Biscayne Boulevard in the northeast section of the study area. Additionally, even pedestrian access, let alone connectivity to the river is severely limited.

Little Haiti’s Edison Center Park and Wynwood’s Roberto Clemente Park provide active recreation facilities such as baseball fields, soccer fields and children’s playgrounds. Hardy landscaping must be planted in order to provide an adequate microclimate within the park system that will invite students and the public to utilize the parks and their venues.

Wynwood’s Roberto Clemente Park

Signage of park entrance is insufficient  
Park entrance is hidden

Children’s park fenced in with little vegetation  
Parking lot holds very few cars
Park entrance is hidden and fenced

Waste disposal area exposed and not maintained

Visual clutter is a major problem for the FEC open space and recreation areas. Billboards and above ground utilities clutter are prominent. The most abundant type of clutter is the fencing that surrounds the parks and the playgrounds, which create a perception of danger by virtue of the very measures taken to guard these properties. Fences destroy the normal sense of openness and approachability of a park and give the area a character of defense and anonymity despite the large areas of lawns interspersed with shade trees. Trash receptacles are present in the park system, but the few that exist are neither well maintained nor used properly.
Changes are needed in the way the public currently interacts with the area’s parks. In order to provide visitors with a sense of safety, proper lighting, maintenance, and design solutions are needed to create pedestrian access, a unique identity, and a sense of place. Plants can be used as physical barriers along property lines and fences to divide certain sports activities or to direct pedestrian traffic along various parts of the parks. Other possibilities will emerge as individual designers work to solve the problems of each particular park. As recommended with all uses of plants in various design situations, a variety of form, texture and color will be helpful in reducing monotony and increasing aesthetic values.\footnote{Walker, D. T. 1991. \textit{Planting Design}. Van Nostrand Reinhold. New York.}

The physical movement of people through the parks, open spaces and recreation areas can be effectively controlled with the use of plant materials. Low plantings of three feet or less may provide a type of control that is more psychological than physical. Children may find low plantings very inviting to jump over or run through. In some situations, plants need to be planted very close together and thorny varieties used in order to achieve effective physical control. Those plantings that are three to six feet or more in height offer the greatest amount of physical control for both humans and animals.

The microclimate within the park system can be effectively modified by the use of plants. Trees have provided shade and been used for windbreaks for hundreds of years. The considerable use of asphalt and concrete in urban areas has had a dramatic effect on the rise of temperature levels. Plants can assist in reducing these temperature increases.\footnote{Ibid.}
Margaret Pace Park NE Bayshore drive

Neighborhood Park NE 61st St.

R.E. Lee School Park NW 5th Ave.
Public Cemetery NE 17th Ter.  Bay Wood Park NE 39th St.

Williams Park NE 17th St.  Jewish Community Center NE 17th St.

Edison Center Park NE 62nd St.
A distinguishing characteristic of the entire FEC Corridor study area is the inordinate amount of vacant and underdeveloped land, located particularly along commercial corridors. Vacant and underutilized land and buildings at key intersections create a blighted overall appearance. This condition is exacerbated by barren streetscapes, decaying public infrastructure and a general lack of green space throughout the corridor.

The undeveloped vacant lots in the FEC Corridor are clearly conducive to open space and recreation development. They also provide opportunities for building secure parking garages with controlled entry to reduce the impact of parking vehicles along the street. Additionally, vacant lots offer unique but challenging opportunities for infill housing. The challenge is not only to create housing that is truly affordable to local residents but also to create affordable housing that has interesting design qualities and is in harmony with the long-standing character of Miami’s neighborhoods.
Vacant Property in the FEC Corridor
FEC Right-of-way:

The FEC right-of-way can be characterized as the spine of the study area. Unfortunately, it is viewed by most residents as an under-utilized eyesore and an obstacle for pedestrian movement throughout the corridor. For the most part, the right-of-way has ample width to accommodate a linear greenway or trail system that would connect neighborhood to neighborhood and neighborhoods to districts and to the downtown area. Greenways are landscape linkages designed to connect open spaces and form protected corridors that follow natural and developed terrain features, and embrace ecological, cultural, and recreational amenities. They can be established as linear open spaces along either natural corridors such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridgeline or developed land such as roadway, railway, or canal way converted to recreational use. Those areas

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in close proximity to warehouses that result in narrow-width corridor segments disadvantageous to trail development, can utilize alternate local roads in the vicinity to accommodate the recommended greenway.

A linear greenway can bring nature to the FEC Corridor residents and enhance recreation opportunities within short distances from living or working environments. It can offer recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, jogging, biking, boating, fishing, and nature watching. Establishing a greenway can enhance the aesthetic quality and sense of community in the FEC Corridor. An FEC Corridor greenway can also provide access and linkage among natural, cultural, and historic sites. It can help conserve natural resources and reduce environmental pollution by encouraging residents to use alternate means of transportation such as bicycling or walking. Greenways can provide wildlife habitat and migration corridors to enhance biological diversity. An aesthetically inviting greenway would also promote and improve pedestrian access and movement east and west through the FEC Corridor.

The restoration and management plan for the FEC Corridor linear greenway should emphasize natural community restoration and stream corridor development. The subtropical richness of the natural habitat should be structurally and functionally restored to the greatest extent possible. Emphasis should be placed on rare, threatened, and endangered species and communities.
The integration of the Little River with remnants of natural habitat is ecologically, culturally, and recreationally significant for the urban landscape of the FEC corridor. The Little River should be preserved and restored to provide ample educational and recreational opportunities in a greenway and blue-way network. Along the Little River, the Tequesta Mound of the Native Americans, the bird sanctuary and historic homes located north of 79th street can be a part of a trail system that can be linked into the FEC linear greenway along the FEC right-of-way.

Throughout the trail, information plaques should be located to inform the public of wildlife in the area, the type of vegetation that they are witnessing as well as a way of informing them of the importance of preservation and conservation.

In landscape, context is as important as content. Connectivity should be addressed, along with habitat quality and extent. Together with the proposed FEC linear greenway, the Little River will approximate the ecological benefits of a large patch in the landscape corridor connectivity for water and overland movement of species, core habitat for interior species, small sites for species that

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use multiple habitats, and buffer against extinction of species during environmental changes.19

The Little River corridor is mostly impacted by urbanization around 79th Street. Along this stretch, lawns and exotic vegetation are predominant along the stream. North of 79th Street, the urban impact is less extensive although the banks are impacted by considerable stretches of Brazilian Pepper (Schinus terebinthifolius). Exotic vegetation should be removed and replaced with Mangroves (red, Rhizophora magle, black, Avicennia germinans, white, Laguncularia racemosa) in the tidal swamps and with native buttonwoods (green buttonwoods, Conocarpus erectus) and other native vegetation along the uplands of the river. Environmental permits should be obtained to insure the safe passage of manatees. The flow of fresh water should be enhanced to sustain the vitality of the stream and to check salt-water intrusion. Sources of debris and pollutants should be eliminated.20

The scenic quality of the river should be emulated in restoration efforts. Its vegetated banks and hammocks may serve as models for passive recreation areas such as pocket parks in the neighborhoods situated along the banks of the river. The Little River can provide canoeing for visitors and residents to view blue herons, ducks, redwing blackbirds, and amphibians.


Little River

Tequesta Mound
Potential Recreational Activities:

Passive Recreation Areas/Pocket parks

Passive recreation areas are rest areas where different aspects and views of the natural and cultural surrounding are seen and appreciated. Biscayne Bay waterfront is a potential area for locating several pocket parks that can accommodate bike racks, benches, shade trees, water fountains and trash receptacles. These pocket parks can be utilized for east-west pedestrian connectivity. The proposed 25th Street waterfront pocket park serves as a model.

The issue of connectivity also applies to open space and recreation resources outside the FEC study area, including Morningside Bayfront Park and Margaret Pace Park where pedestrian access is limited. Pocket parks should be proposed along the Little River, which bends through 79th Street and Biscayne Boulevard in the northeast section of the study area where pedestrian access is severely limited.
Pedestrian Paths/Trails

A non-motorized multiuse path can occupy the FEC right-of-way. The FEC right-of-way has ample width to accommodate a linear greenway or trail system that can be intertwined together with the information areas, cultural centers, recreational activity centers, and passive recreation areas as well as along major streams and rivers and waterfront areas. Trailheads are usually designed as a park/plaza with motor vehicle and bicycle storage. If the trail is to pass a stream of water, a boardwalk/bridge should be provided for the purpose of safety and to prevent any tramping of potentially sensitive areas. Its design should not be overpowering but become part of the landscape. It should also take into
consideration the potential natural views that may be enhanced by perspective interest.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Bicycling}

A bike trail should be scenic. It should provide rest areas where different aspects and views of the natural and cultural surrounding are seen and appreciated. The bike trails or bike lanes with proper design definition can be used for the purpose of jogging as well, as long as proper definition between both is provided.

\textbf{Picnicking}

Picnic areas should be designed within vegetated areas of the FEC Corridor park system to keep a constant flora canopy throughout the parks. The picnic areas should include shelters. All amenities such as drinking water, bathrooms, benches, picnic tables, barbecue pits as well as shelters should be provided. All amenities should be handicapped accessible. All picnic areas should be easily

accessible to parking areas as well as park entrances. The picnic areas should have sports facilities such as sand volleyball courts and children’s playgrounds.22

**Water Related Activities**

Each water related activity requires different design guidelines as well as different safety precautions to make it an enjoyable experience for all.

**Boating**

Biscayne Bay provides ample opportunities for water sports such as boating, jet skiing and canoeing. The boating routes should take into consideration sensitive management areas as well as buffer zones to protect endangered species or flora.

**Canoeing**

Canoeing is preferable for areas with passive waterways that allow the maximum enjoyment of the natural flora and surroundings. The canoe drop-off zones should be located at the bottom of the stream opposite the water’s current. All natural elements of the area are to be respected. Canoe trails can be used for both enjoyment and education.

**Fishing**

Allocation of fishing areas within a park system brings a different group of people who otherwise would have not utilized the public land for recreation purpose. By having fishing within a management area, it allows officials to monitor and control fishing activities. This helps assure that certain endangered species can be protected and monitored. The stream should have road access for the drop-off of boats or other floating devices. It should be wide enough to allow turning and parking spaces for the vehicles dropping off their boats. When possible, a

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22 Ibid.
boardwalk or dock should run parallel to the water’s edge to allow docking or other passive activities to occur.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{Bus Stops}

Capacity utilization of the urban infrastructure and great functional diversity create an extreme condensation effect that contributes to the quality of urban space. However, this density must be complemented and balanced by generous recreational areas and green spaces that are easily and quickly accessible by public transport. A public transit development along the FEC right-of-way can create accessibility to the proposed FEC greenway and be combined with other pedestrian oriented improvements.

The typical Metro bench is unprotected from climatic conditions and provides no aesthetic character.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
Bus stop designs contribute to the overall character of the area and serve to announce major intersections where heavy pedestrian activity may be expected.

**Wildlife**

One of the more urgent needs in the FEC Corridor is the establishment of urban wildlife reserves and corridors. The responsibility of humans for the landscape and all of its organisms has normally been neglected in overall planning and zoning structures, and maintenance of biological diversity “in our backyards” has not been given proper consideration. Educational programs such as the “Backyard wildlife habitat” can provide information to the residents on attracting wildlife. The National Institute for Urban Wildlife (NIUW) and Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Council are the two organizations that support the development of urban and backyard wildlife habitats. When schoolyards or parks are enhanced with ponds, feeding stations, and appropriate plantings, they are capable of attracting a variety of songbirds and other wildlife while at the same time improving the environment.\(^\text{24}\)

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Criteria that apply to the FEC Corridor related to preserving wildlife habitat and connective corridors include the following:

- Integration of wildlife habitat maintenance into the planning process
- Identifying critical plant habitats and species
- Protecting riparian vegetation
- Establishing continuous corridors
- Developing a corridor of interconnected open spaces for wildlife and people based upon the riparian habitat existing throughout the FEC Corridor
- Disturbing as little natural vegetation as possible

The FEC Corridor parks systems developed in the traditional manner with large areas of lawns interspersed with shade trees supports less diversity of wildlife than do landscapes with a fuller, more natural mixture of deciduous and evergreen species of different ages and multiple layers of vegetation. These characteristics, which are desirable for wildlife are also those that many public officials and park managers find problematic for humans due to the cover such landscapes provide for criminal activity and the difficulty of policing areas with vegetative screening. This is an issue with no easy answer. One response that can be applied in many areas is to clearly provide and identify a hierarchy of park and wildlife facilities, each having characteristics and limitations that tend to determine appropriate locations.

**Interpretive Signage**

The design and planning for human connection to the FEC study area landscape and habitat areas is critical. Most species within urban settings have adapted to humans in close proximity. The Little River and the Biscayne Bay waterfront provide ample opportunities for visitors and residents in the FEC Corridor to view wildlife. Interpretive signage is needed to educate city and suburban residents on issues of ecology and wildlife. They inform the public of wildlife in the area.
and the type of vegetation that they are observing. It is also a way of informing
the public about the importance of preservation. The combination of a well-
crafted "story line" with professional graphics can have greater impact and
meaning.
References:


