
Metrozoo

FINDING OF NECESSITY STUDY

2014 Update



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Miami-Dade County, Florida

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Executive Summary</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Location</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Land Use</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Infrastructure</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Environmental Health</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Conclusion</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Appendix</u>	<u>10</u>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community Redevelopment Areas or CRA's have been utilized by counties and municipalities as a redevelopment and revitalization tool since the establishment of the Community Redevelopment Act in 1969.

In designating an area as a CRA governing bodies are afforded the opportunity to leverage public financing for the purpose of land acquisition, demolition, housing and infrastructure improvements, environmental remediation, neighborhood enhancement and other similar activities. This is accomplished through a funding mechanism known as Tax Increment Financing (TIF). TIF operates by conducting a tax assessment throughout the CRA in the fiscal year in which the CRA is first established. This figure serves as the baseline tax assessment. A pre-determined percentage (between 50% - 95%) of any increase in tax revenue over and above this baseline year is then pledged for future years. In subsequent years as new development and redevelopment occurs within the CRA it is expected that tax revenues will increase. The increment pledged over and above the initial year's assessment is placed in a redevelopment trust fund on an annual basis for reinvestment back into the CRA. As such, TIF generates revenue to support the finance, construction, and maintenance of various types of improvements in a targeted area without the need to impose an additional tax.

This report examines the Metrozoo area and its surrounds in south Miami-Dade County and provides the data and findings necessary to analyze whether or not conditions of "slum" and/or "blight" exists as defined under Florida State Statute 163.340(7)(8). Such conditions must be present in order to deem an area suitable for designation as a CRA with the ability to utilize TIF revenues. Formally known as a "Finding of Necessity Study," this report is required by Florida State Statute 163.355 for all counties and municipalities considering exercising community redevelopment authority over a specific geographic area:

163.355 Finding of Necessity by county or municipality - No county or municipality shall exercise the community redevelopment authority conferred by this part until after the governing body has adopted a resolution, supported by data and analysis, which makes a legislative finding that the conditions in the area meet the criteria described in s. 163.340(7)(8)

In summary, the data and findings show that the following conditions of blight are present within the Metrozoo study area:

CONDITIONS OF BLIGHT
Predominance of defective parking facilities and roadways
Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility or usefulness
Deterioration of site or other improvements
Inadequate and outdated building density pattern
Diversity of ownership or defective or unusual conditions of title which prevent the free alienability of land
Government owned property with adverse environmental conditions caused by a public or private entity

As such, appropriate redevelopment and revitalization activities within the proposed Metrozoo CRA could include:

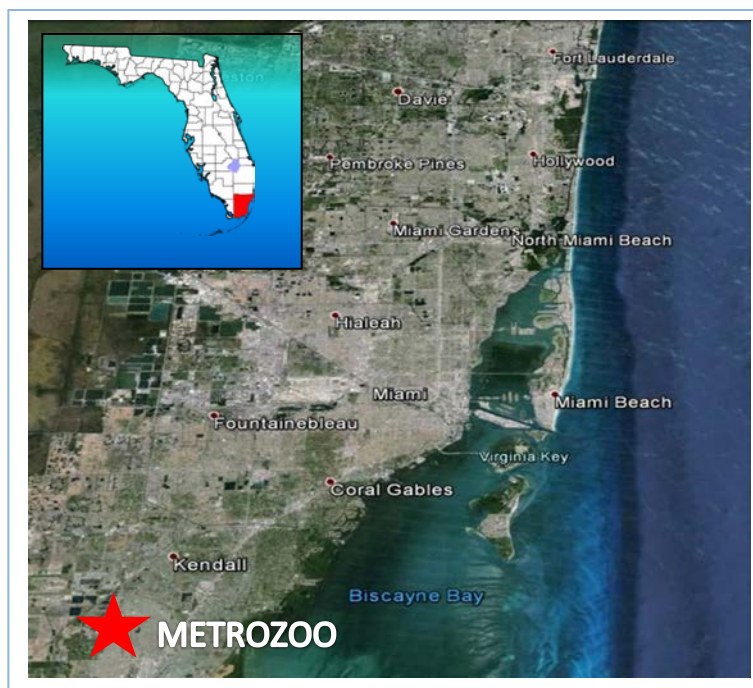
- Upgrading transportation infrastructure to decrease drive times and accommodate future growth
- Redeveloping or improving parking facilities in order to ensure the highest and best use of land
- Constructing appropriate infill development on vacant or underutilized land to facilitate more appropriate building density patterns
- Demolishing dilapidated or deteriorated structures
- Brownfield remediation and redevelopment
- Commercial revitalization and small business development

LOCATION

Wedged between the Kendall and South Miami Heights communities in Miami-Dade County, the Metrozoo study area lies just over 15 miles southwest of the City of Miami.

Area boundaries include SW 152nd Street to the north, SW 117th Avenue to the east, SW 184th Street to the south, and SW 137th Avenue to the west.



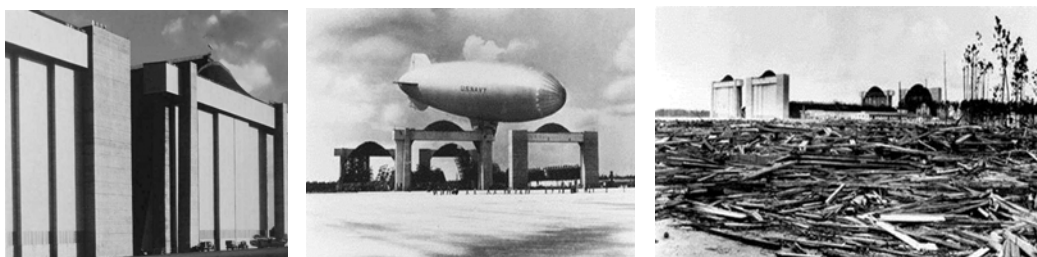


LAND USE

Metrozoo

Development of the area known as Metrozoo began in 1942 with the establishment of Naval Air Station Richmond (NAS Richmond). The station took its name from the Richmond Timber Company who previously occupied the site, using it for the harvesting of valuable pine - some of which still stands as preserve area today. Here, lighter-than-air airships (LTA) more commonly known as “blimps” were constructed by the Navy to support aerial searches for German submarines in the Atlantic during World War II. The secluded site comprised of over 2,000 acres housed three LTA hangers each nearly seventeen stories high, making them among the world’s largest wooden structures at the time. There were also barrack facilities and large expansive areas used as landing pads for LTA and other military and civilian aircraft. Railway tracks allowed trains to bring in the necessary supplies, gasoline, and helium vital to the operations of the naval base.

In September of 1945 just 3 years after its commissioning, an unnamed hurricane with estimated winds up to 196 mph swept across the NAS Richmond site. Whatever was not damaged by the hurricane directly was destroyed by a fire resulting from gasoline tanks being ripped apart by the strong winds and ignited. The three wooden LTA hangers were decimated, never to be rebuilt. All that remained of the former naval base were some of the concrete support structures, rail tracks, landing pad areas, and the administrative headquarters building.



Historic photos of Naval Air Station Richmond before and after the devastating hurricane of 1945

Photo Credit: www.airfields-freeman.com



The LTA landing pads as they were constructed in 1942 (left) and as they remain today (center). Some of the old concrete supporting structures which were part of the LTA hanger buildings are now part of the Gold Coast Railroad Museum site (right).

With its sudden decommissioning in November of 1945, no comprehensive master plan or future vision for the redevelopment of the NAS Richmond site was ever established. As such, an ad-hoc development pattern emerged over time as portions of the unplatted land were either sold off or leased in a piecemeal manner, namely to government entities and private institutions.



The piecemeal redevelopment approach and faulty lot layout of the former NAS Richmond site is evident in the asymmetrical division of property lines. The result is a mélange of oddly shaped parcels that contrast sharply with the typical square or rectangular shape of most platted lots. Being considerably large in size, these lots contribute to inadequate and outdated building density patterns as compared to the building density pattern evident in the surrounding area.

Today, the major landholders within the Metrozoo area are Miami-Dade County, the U.S. Federal Government, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Florida Power and Light, and the University of Miami. Current uses include the Federal Correctional Institution Miami, the Luis E. Martinez Army Reserve Center, a U.S. Coast Guard communication and antennae field, and the University of Miami South Campus research facilities. Dedicated uses for Miami-Dade County's properties include the Robert Morgan Educational Center, Larry and Penny Thompson Park, Zoo Miami, Miami Military Museum, the Gold Coast Railroad Museum, and the Southern Anchor townhomes.

The Zoo Miami, Gold Coast Railroad Museum, and Miami Military Museum have all attempted to incorporate infrastructure leftover from the NAS Richmond's heyday into the layout of their respective sites. The historic naval administrative headquarters building is currently undergoing significant renovations to become home to the Miami Military Museum & Veterans Memorial. The railroad line that once brought in helium and other supplies now displays relics such as the Presidential Pullman used by Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, and Reagan at the Gold Coast Railroad Museum. Deteriorating pavement that once served as the landing pad area for LTA airships is now being used as visitor parking for both museums and the Zoo Miami. A portion of the Southern Anchor property contains boarded-up residential structures which were sold to the County and once used as housing for U.S. Coast Guard personnel.

Such attempts to re-purpose the former NAS Richmond facility fail to obscure the fact that the large site containing over 2,000 acres was not originally designed or platted to accommodate multiple, interconnected, smaller scale uses like the museums and tourist attractions which exists on the site today. A general lack of connectivity, inadequate infrastructure, isolation of the various facilities, faulty lot layouts, and large expanses of underdeveloped and underutilized land all serve as evidence of this fact.



TOP LEFT: Railroad infrastructure leftover from the NAS Richmond facility has been incorporated into the Gold Coast Railroad Museum campus.

BOTTOM LEFT: Boarded up structures at the Southern Anchor property

TOP RIGHT: Underdeveloped and underutilized parking lots plague the Zoo Miami site.

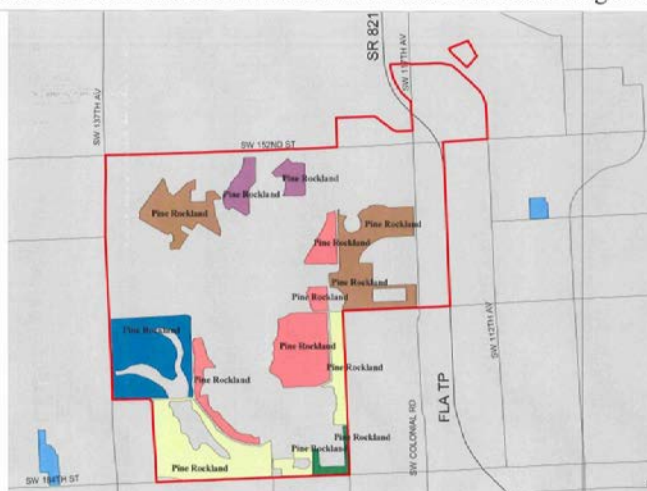
BOTTOM RIGHT: The former NAS Richmond administration building is currently being renovated and will be used as a military museum and memorial for veterans.

Unusual conditions of title exist on certain portions of land within Metrozoo which includes deed restrictions that only allow parcels to be leased or licensed to private development. In addition there are restrictions in effect which dictate the manner in which a parcel may be used, potentially limiting a site's operations to a parking area or public recreation area. Commercial uses such as hotels, restaurants or retail are strictly prohibited in some cases or only allowed as an ancillary use with limited hours of operation. The proximity of high-security U.S. Government facilities to publicly accessible attractions creates an additional layer of regulation which includes development buffers, easements, and conveyance restrictions.

According to the Division of Environmental Resources Management a significant portion of Metrozoo also contains areas of natural forest communities and endangered lands consisting primarily of intact pine rocklands. Pine rocklands are a globally-imperiled habitat occurring only in south Miami-Dade County, the Florida Keys, and the Bahama Islands. As such, development within Metrozoo is further restricted by the desire to maintain natural preserve areas which must be considered in the design, planning and permitting of future development projects. Furthermore, development of any kind may be prohibited on certain environmental lands unless such development activity can be deemed an absolute public necessity.

Such unusual conditions of title combined with development restrictions and the presence of significant environmentally sensitive areas prevents the free alienability of land, impairs growth, and inhibits the ability to attract private investment to the area.

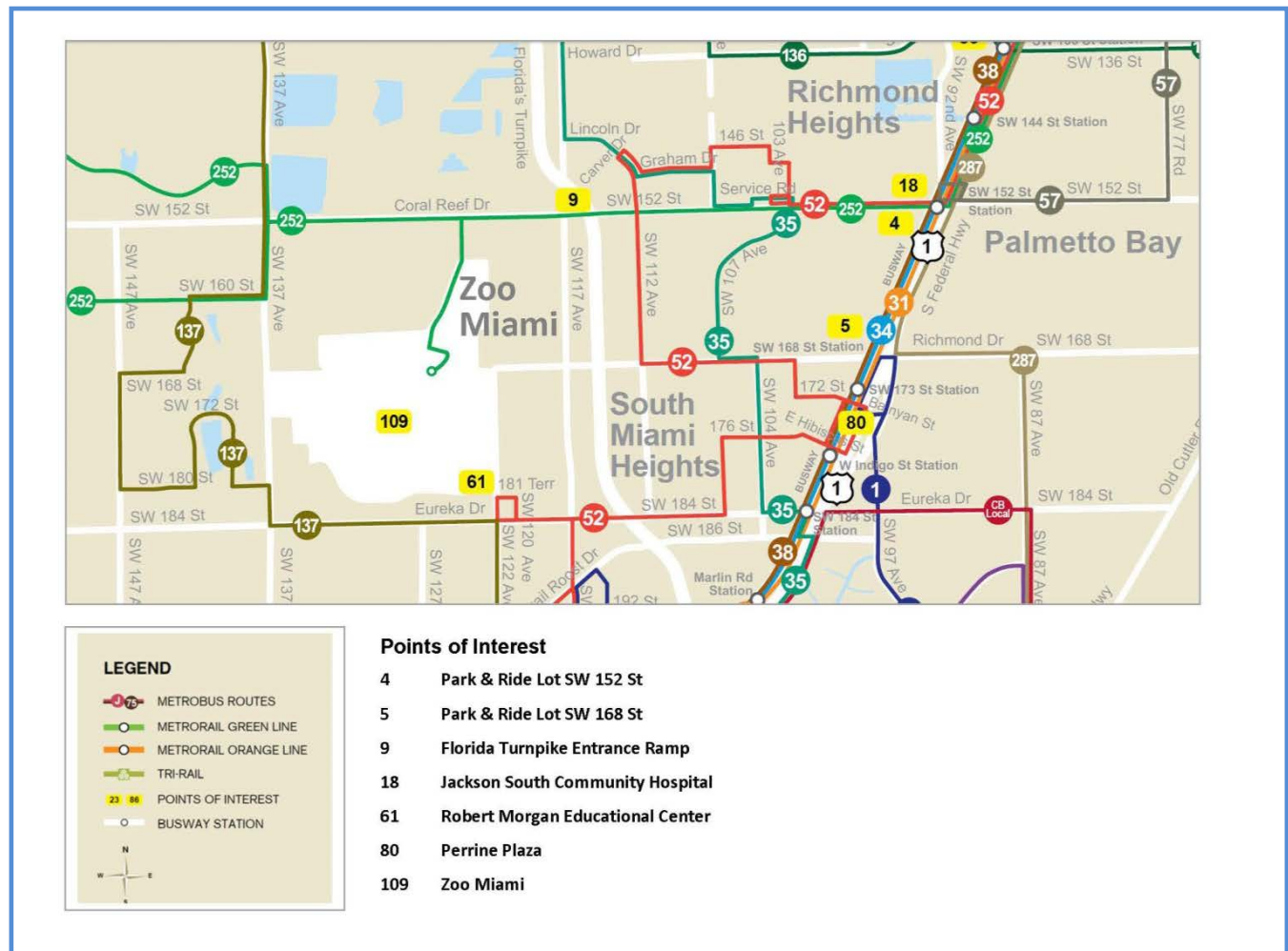
Natural Forest Communities within the Metrozoo Richmond Heights CRA



INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation

Drivers have easy access from Metrozoo to the regional highway system via the Homestead Extension of the Florida Turnpike, which is expected to be widened to 12-lanes plus auxiliary lanes with express service by 2025. Transit users may traverse the area via Bus Routes 252, 52, 35, and 137. In addition, there are several other bus routes available in close proximity and two park and ride lots providing direct access to the express Busway Corridor. There is currently an unfunded Bus Rapid Transit project proposed in the County's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan to provide a dedicated bus transit lane on 152nd Street between SW 137th Avenue and US-1. Metrozoo is also served by the pedestrian and cyclist oriented Black Creek Trail, which connects to both the Old Cutler Trail and the Biscayne Trail, terminating at the waterfront Black Point Park and Marina approximately eight miles to the southeast.

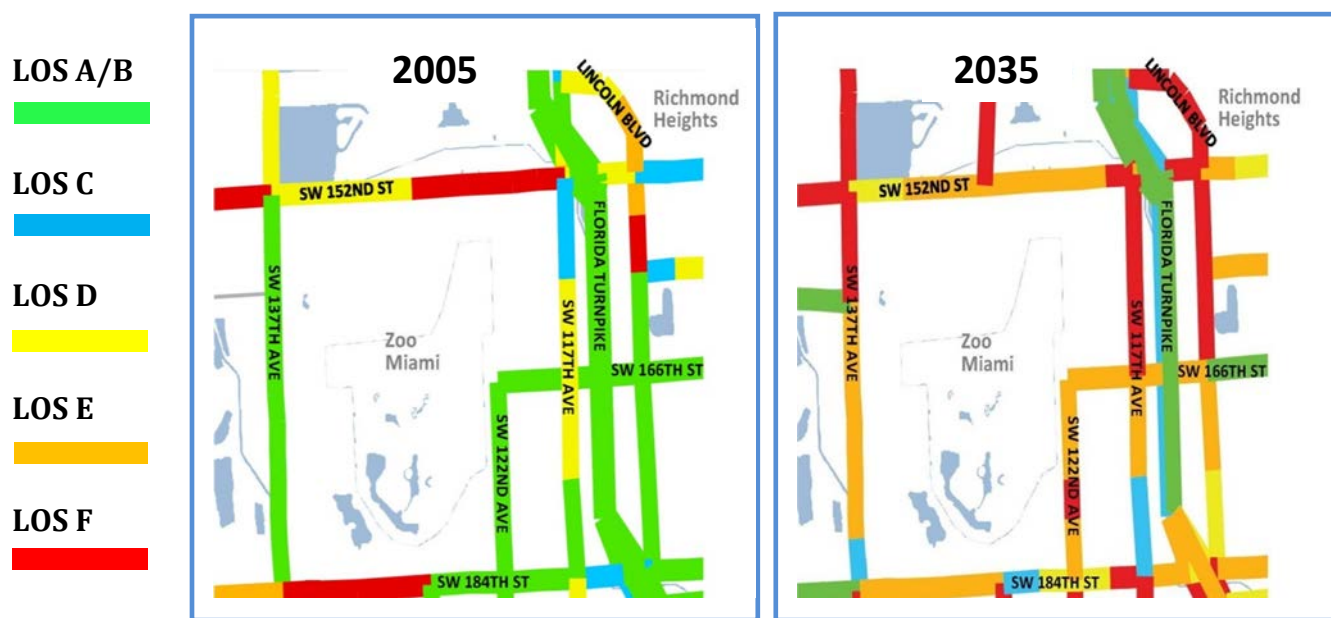


In terms of roadway capacity and traffic flow the number of car trips originating in the Metrozoo area and surrounds is projected to increase by 38% from 33,014 trips to 45,616 trips between 2005 and 2035. Other than lane widening of the Turnpike, there are no funded local road improvements listed within the County's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan document that would accommodate these projected additional trips. This is due to the limited amount of funding available for transportation improvements throughout the County as a whole during the Plan period. As such, roadway capacity is expected to decline over time resulting in increased delays and travel times.

ORIGIN	2005 TRIPS	2035 TRIPS	PERCENT INCREASE
Richmond Heights	8,899	12,847	+44%
Deerwood Town Center	9,859	12,090	+23%
SW 117th Avenue	4,250	6,713	+58%
Larry and Penny Park	3,063	3,294	+8%
Zoo Miami/Gold Coast Museum/Military Museum	1,463	2,098	+43%
LTC Luis Martinez Army Reserve Center	538	592	+10%
Coral Reef Commons	131	1,014	+674%
Miami Federal Correctional Institute	986	1,592	+61%
Villa Encantada, Pinebrook, Vista Alegre and Coral Reef Village	3,825	5,376	+41%
TOTAL	33,014	45,616	+38%

Source: Miami-Dade 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan Directional Trip Distribution Report

The graphics below are a visual demonstration of how traffic conditions are expected to worsen as taken from the 2009 Final Report for the Miami-Dade 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan Update. As shown in the legend, each roadway is assigned a Level of Service (LOS) ranging from A to F with LOS A/B signifying the best operating conditions and LOS F signifying the worst. LOS A/B indicates an uninterrupted traffic flow with little or no delay while LOS F indicates forced low speeds where volumes are below capacity resulting in congestion, traffic jams and vehicular backups. The majority of roadways in the area are expected to be rated LOS E or LOS F by 2035.



Inadequate roadway capacity will be a significant deterrent to attracting private investment and economic development to the area, as the provision of adequate infrastructure service is often the greatest expenditure in development apart from land and construction costs. Proposed projects such as the mixed-use Coral Reef Commons and Miami Wilds theme park - expected to attract 3 million visitors annually - will require upgrades to roadways, parking areas, and utilities. In order to be viable, the Miami Wilds project alone will require a \$130 million investment of public funds to construct the necessary public infrastructure.

With several large tracts of land slated for redevelopment, the Metrozoo current infrastructure is inadequate and cannot support the proposed increase to more appropriate densities. Significant infrastructure upgrades will be required to meet future demand created from proposed redevelopment projects shown clockwise from right: Twentieth Century Fox Miami Wilds theme park, Coral Reef Commons shopping center and new residential development, and the revamped Gold Coast Railroad Museum. Source: Miami Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Space



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

There are several environmentally contaminated sites or brownfields within the Metrozoo study area located at the former Richmond Naval Air Station base site. Such sites will require administrative clean-up and the contamination may serve as an impediment to redevelopment and investment in the area.

SITE NAME	LOCATION	STATUS
Former Richmond Naval Air Station (Petroleum Storage Tanks)	15801 SW 137th AVE	Petroleum contaminated site; currently conducting remedial action
Former Richmond Naval Air Station (Defense Site) Federal Army Corps of Engineers (Lead Site)	various parcels	Industrial/military use contaminated site

CONCLUSION

Through the assessment and analysis of information obtained from statistical databases, area reports, County staff, community stakeholders and the general public there is evidence that conditions of blight exist within the boundaries of the proposed Metrozoo Community Redevelopment Area as follows:

- ✓ **Predominance of Defective Parking Facilities and Roadways**
Metrozoo suffers from defective parking facilities and would serve to benefit from more efficient parking design and layout. Specifically, the Zoo Miami, Railroad Museum and Military Museum parking facilities consists of large swaths of underutilized, unkempt parking areas formerly used as landing pads for the Navy. In terms of roadways, capacity is expected to decrease such that the majority of roadways in the area will be rated as LOS E or LOS F by 2035. This indicates a progression towards increasingly congested roadways and longer travel times. As such, the current transportation infrastructure is inadequate and lacking in its capacity to support future travel demand. Significant financial investment will be required in order to upgrade and improve the existing transportation network.
- ✓ **Inadequate and Outdated Building Density Pattern and Faulty Lot Layout**
Originally designed to be an over 2,000 acre site accommodating naval activity, land within the Metrozoo was eventually carved-up once Naval Air Station Richmond shuttered its doors. Because these carved out parcels were not laid out as small traditional square or rectangular shaped lots, large oddly-shaped tracts of land emerged over time that lacked the accompanying utility network typically installed when portions of land are subdivided. This results in faulty lot layouts and large swaths of underdeveloped and underutilized parcels of land. Furthermore, the appropriate internal infrastructure necessary to support more appropriate building densities is lacking.
- ✓ **Deterioration of Site or Other Improvements**
Vacant housing units located on a portion of the County-owned Southern Anchor townhomes site previously served as U.S. Coast Guard housing and have now deteriorated to a state of disrepair requiring rehabilitation or tear-down.
- ✓ **Diverse Ownership or Defective or Unusual Conditions of Title Preventing Free Alienability of Land**
The unexpected decommissioning of the former Naval Air Station Richmond site resulted in a piecemeal approach to the sale and redevelopment of land within Metrozoo. The result is a diversity of ownership consisting primarily of Federal, State and County owned sites. With such a considerable amount of acreage dedicated to government purposes, several unusual conditions of title, deed restrictions, and constraints on land conveyance exists which prevents the sale of land to the private sector and limits the development of commercial sites.
- ✓ **Government Owned Property with Adverse Environmental Conditions**
There exists several environmentally contaminated government owned properties at the site of the former Naval Air Station Richmond. Contaminants include petroleum, lead, and arsenic resulting from various forms of industrial and military use over the course of several decades.

Based on the foregoing conditions, designation of the Metrozoo-Richmond Heights study area as a Community Redevelopment Area may be deemed appropriate. The following redevelopment activities are recommended as areas of redevelopment focus designed to revitalize and improve existing conditions within the proposed CRA district:

- Upgrading transportation infrastructure to decrease drive times and accommodate future growth
- Redeveloping parking facilities in order to ensure the highest, best and most efficient use of land
- Infill development on vacant or underutilized land to facilitate more appropriate building density patterns
- Demolishing or rehabilitating dilapidated or deteriorated structures
- Brownfield remediation and redevelopment
- Commercial revitalization, small business development and economic development activities

APPENDIX A

Methodology

This report was created through a process of discovery and data collection which included interviews and information gathering exercises with key Miami-Dade County staff, analysis of statistical datasets, review of previous studies and reports, photo documentation, and stakeholder outreach to engage with residents, business owners, property owners and the general public.

BOARDS & COMMITTEES

Miami-Dade County Board of County Commissioners

Miami-Dade County Tax Increment Finance Committee

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Richmond Heights Alliance Group

Richmond Heights Neighborhood Crime Watch

Richmond Heights Resource Center

STATISTICAL DATABASES

Dade Schools Performance Data

Federal Emergency Management Agency Map Service Center

Florida Community Health Assessment Resource Tool Set (CHARTS)

United States Census Bureau 2008-2012 American Community Survey (ACS)

United States Census Bureau 2010 Census

STUDIES & REPORTS

2009 Gold Coast Railroad Museum: Planning Study and General Plan

2010 Richmond Heights Charrette Area Plan Report

2013 Invitation to Negotiate ("ITN") for Zoo Miami Entertainment Area

2013 Miami-Dade County Economic Demographic Profile

2035 Miami-Dade Long Range Transportation Plan

Abandoned and Little Known Airfields by Paul Freeman www.airfields-freeman.com

Coral Reef Commons CDMP Amendment Transportation Analysis

Miami Wilds Submission to Negotiate Zoo Miami Entertainment Area Development

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APPENDIX B

Definition of “Slum” and “Blighted”

2013 Florida Statutes

Title XI – County Organization and Intergovernmental Relations

Chapter 163 – Intergovernmental Programs

163.340 Definitions

(7) *“SLUM AREA” means an area having physical or economic conditions conducive to disease, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, poverty, or crime because there is a predominance of buildings or improvements, whether residential or nonresidential, which are impaired by reason of dilapidation, deterioration, age, or obsolescence, and exhibiting one or more of the following factors:*

- (a) *Inadequate provision for ventilation, light, air, sanitation, or open spaces;*
- (b) *High density of population, compared to the population density of adjacent areas within the county or municipality; and overcrowding, as indicated by government-maintained statistics or other studies and the requirements of the Florida Building Code; or*
- (c) *The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes.*

(8) *“BLIGHTED AREA” means an area in which there are a substantial number of deteriorated, or deteriorating structures, in which conditions, as indicated by government-maintained statistics or other studies, are leading to economic distress or endanger life or property, and in which two or more of the following factors are present:*

- (a) *Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout, parking facilities, roadways, bridges, or public transportation facilities;*
- (b) *Aggregate assessed values of real property in the area for ad valorem tax purposes have failed to show any appreciable increase over the 5 years prior to the finding of such conditions;*
- (c) *Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;*
- (d) *Unsanitary or unsafe conditions;*
- (e) *Deterioration of site or other improvements;*
- (f) *Inadequate and outdated building density patterns;*
- (g) *Falling lease rates per square foot of office, commercial, or industrial space compared to the remainder of the county or municipality;*
- (h) *Tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land;*
- (i) *Residential and commercial vacancy rates higher in the area than in the remainder of the county or municipality;*
- (j) *Incidence of crime in the area higher than in the remainder of the county or municipality;*

- (k) Fire and emergency medical service calls to the area proportionately higher than in the remainder of the county or municipality;*
- (l) A greater number of violations of the Florida Building Code in the area than the number of violations recorded in the remainder of the county or municipality;*
- (m) Diversity of ownership or defective or unusual conditions of title which prevent the free alienability of land within the deteriorated or hazardous area; or*
- (n) Governmentally owned property with adverse environmental conditions caused by a public or private entity.*

However, the term "blighted area" also means any area in which at least one of the factors identified in paragraphs (a) through (n) are present and all taxing authorities subject to s. 163.387(2)(a) agree, either by interlocal agreement or agreements with the agency or by resolution, that the area is blighted. Such agreement or resolution shall only determine that the area is blighted. For purposes of qualifying for the tax credits authorized in chapter 220, "blighted area" means an area as defined in this subsection.