



**ADVANCING BUSINESSES.  
TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES.  
REDEVELOPING FORT MYERS FOR THE FUTURE.**

**2020 ANNUAL REPORT**







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# Introduction



Veronica S. Shoemaker (1928-2016)

## 1984

The Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Fort Myers (CRA) was first created as the Downtown Redevelopment Agency at the request of the late Councilperson Veronica S. Shoemaker, with the goal of revitalizing downtown's commercial district, which is now branded as the Historic Downtown River District.



Since 1984, the CRA has been at the forefront of local redevelopment efforts occurring in the most blighted areas and spaces in the City of Palms. The City is the commercial hub and the county seat of Lee County, and its vitality is essential to our local economy. According to the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) more than 4,926,400 people visited the area in 2019 with almost 22% visiting Downtown Fort Myers.

More than 92,599 people call Fort Myers home, and it being a premier destination to visit, the redevelopment of Fort Myers' most distressed neighborhoods and commercial corridors remain vital to our community's success. This report will present you with an overview of the progress and opportunities ahead for the CRA.

In September 2019, a fiscal audit of the Fort Myers CRA was completed in conjunction with the City of Fort Myers audit. Finally, this Annual Report closes with a brief profile and data points for each of our redevelopment areas, as well as highlights and activities in 2020.

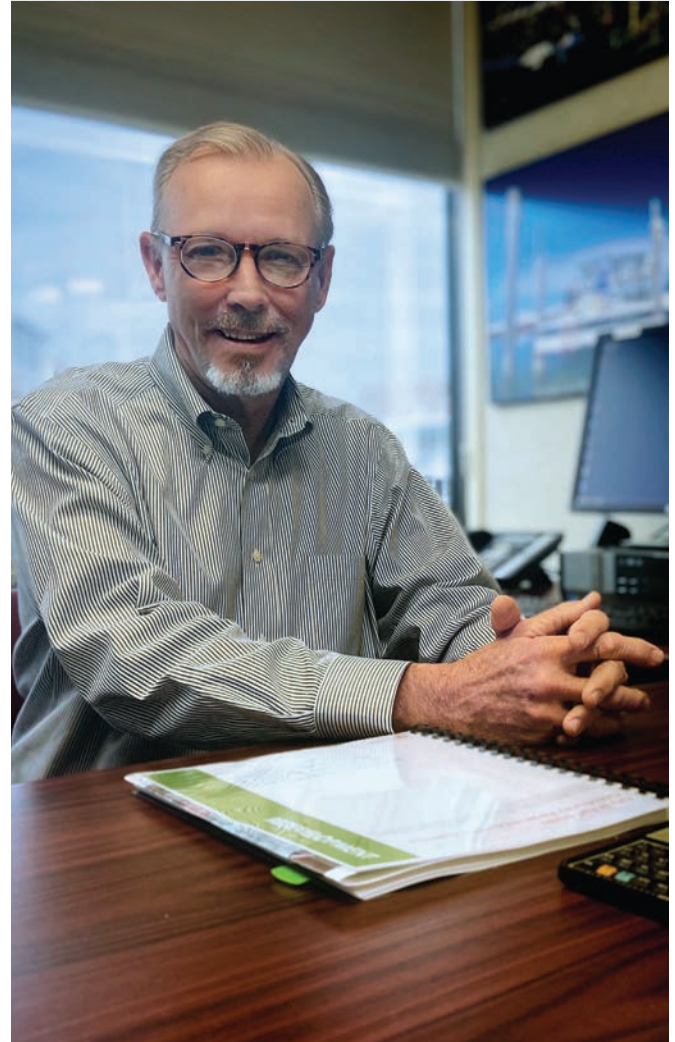


# From the CRA Board Chair

As Chairman of the Fort Myers CRA, I am pleased to present the 2020 CRA Annual Report and am particularly proud of the way CRA leadership and staff responded to months of unprecedented disruptions. When local community leaders issued a “work safe stay home” order, the agency’s leaders ensured all employees could safely work remotely. Together, CRA staff and administration developed a “Stay Home Be Well” campaign to keep our community informed and encouraged as they adapted to respond to changes caused by the pandemic. The success of the campaign was recognized by the Florida League of Cities mini magazine, “Leading From the Front.” Our leadership and staff continue to adapt as circumstances evolve, and they remain responsive and progressive in their efforts to support our still rapidly growing community.

Our community was exceptionally pleased to see construction completed and to celebrate the long-awaited opening of two CRA-supported projects: Grand Central Apartments in the Cleveland Avenue redevelopment area and the Luminary Hotel & Co. in the Downtown redevelopment area. These valuable projects occupy sites that remained vacant land for more than 20 years, generated no revenue for our community, and were severely blighted. In addition, to better promote the economic vitality of Minority-owned Business Enterprises (MBEs), Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs) and placemaking efforts within our City, the CRA Commission approved a revision of its Tax Increment Rebate Program to provide incentives for the developers of Affordable Housing, the use of MBEs and DBEs, and the support of local non-profits whose aims and efforts align with CRA’s.

This report outlines the CRA’s financials and activities of the entire CRA team during the past year, in collaboration with our community, city, and county partners, to revitalize our redevelopment areas. In closing, the details of this report and the actions of CRA throughout this extraordinary year leaves me proud that despite unprecedented challenges, CRA staff continued to deliver outstanding services and partnered with citizens, business owners, and community stakeholders to provide vital support for those in our community most affected by the pandemic.



Sincerely,

*Fred Burson*

Board of Commissioners, Chair



# From the CRA Executive Director



On behalf of the City of Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), I am pleased to provide the CRA's Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2019/2020, which ended on September 30, 2020. These pages detail extraordinary achievements growing our community over the past months, accomplishments all the more remarkable because of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Safeguarding public health meant largely suspending community activities, yet not only did the CRA maintain operations, it persevered, overcoming the headwinds of the health crisis while continuing to position and redevelop our community for the future.

No one needs to be reminded just how unusual recent times have been. But it is also important to recognize the unique challenges of the past year along with the unprecedented opportunities that arose for learning, growth, and redevelopment in the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

During 2020, we expanded our outreach and shared information to keep our constituents safe through a multi-channel awareness campaign titled "Stay Home Be Well." Because construction was acknowledged as an essential working service, we were pleased to see long-awaited CRA-supported projects like the Luminary Hotel & Co. opened for business. This development brought new life and jobs to our downtown redevelopment area at a time when it was needed most. Additionally, through the steadfast efforts of the CRA and our many partners, we continued to make progress in our Cleveland Avenue and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. redevelopment areas.

We look forward to great things in store for 2021. Our businesses and citizens have proven their resilience, and the Fort Myers CRA continues to bolster efforts to build on our successes. We hope that this report will allow you to appreciate the CRA's shared commitment to growth, health, and prosperity and to our partners' aim to redevelop our Fort Myers community for the future.

Sincerely,

*Michele Hylton-Terry*

Executive Director





# CRA Leadership



Fred Burson, Chair  
CRA Commissioner



Kevin Anderson, Vice Chair  
CRA Commissioner



Teresa Watkins Brown  
CRA Commissioner



Johnny W. Streets, Jr.  
CRA Commissioner



Terolyn Watson  
CRA Commissioner



Dr. Liston D. Bochette III  
CRA Commissioner



Darla Bonk  
CRA Commissioner



Michele Hylton-Terry  
CRA Executive Director

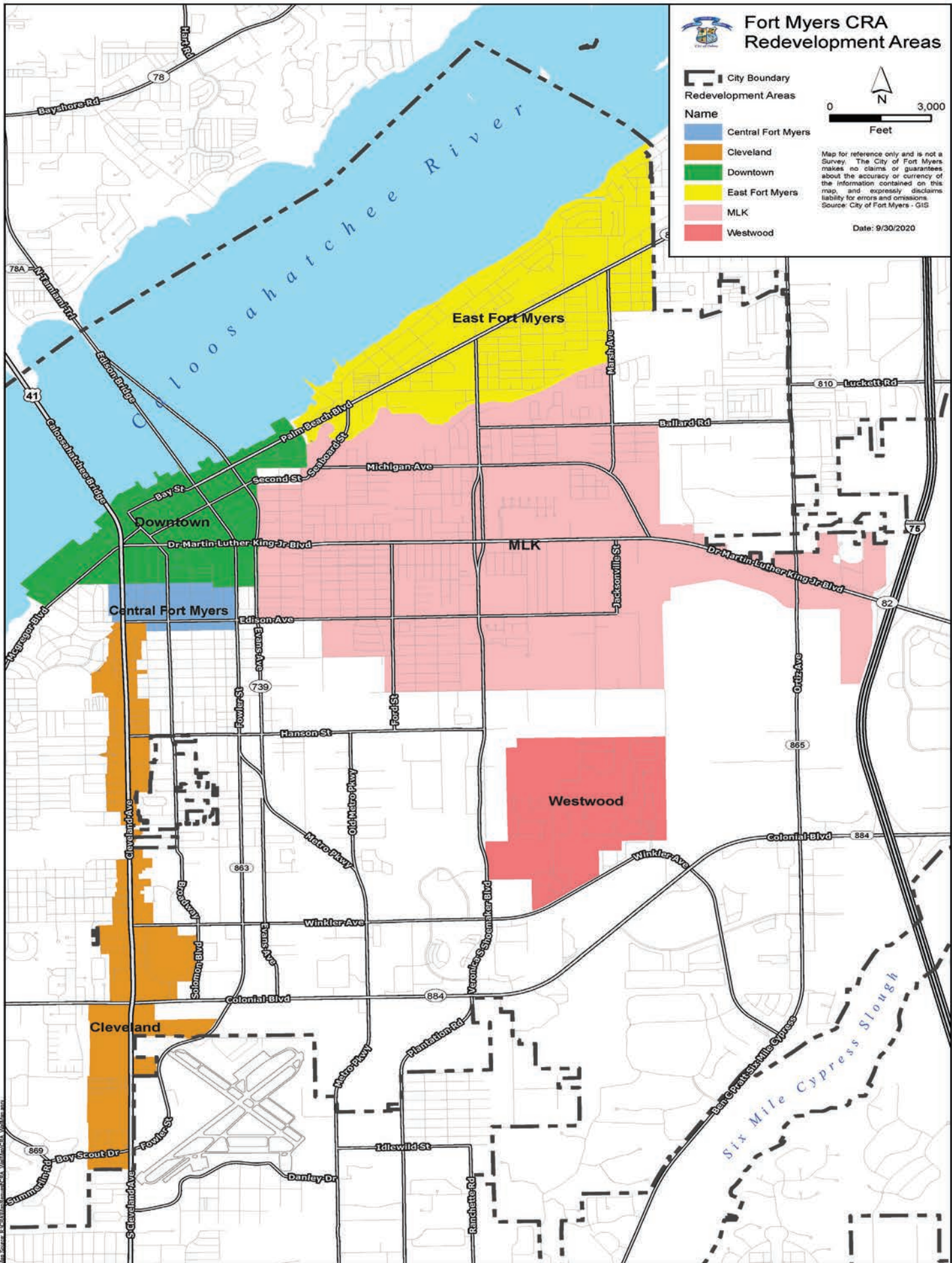
## Advisory Board

Jarrett Eady .....	Advisory Board Chair
Dr. Gerald Laboda.....	Advisory Board Vice Chair
Kirk Beck .....	Advisory Board Member
Michael D. Doyle.....	Advisory Board Member
Bruce Grady.....	Advisory Board Member
Jami McCormick.....	Advisory Board Member
Gerri Ware .....	Advisory Board Member

## CRA Staff

Antoine M. Williams .....	Assistant Director
Cheryl Thornton .....	Fiscal Manager
Natalie S. Dunham.....	Advertising & Promotions Manager
Aaron Tate .....	Community Redevelopment Specialist
Renee Turbeville.....	Community Redevelopment Specialist
Sheryl Rea .....	Sr. Administrative Assistant





# Financials

## Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency



Florida Department of Economic Opportunity Special District Accountability Program ID	379
Registered Agent	Ms. Michele Hylton-Terry
Office/Mailing Address	1400 Jackson St., Suite 102, Fort Myers, FL 33901
Telephone	(239) 321-7100
Fax	n/a
Email	mhylton@cityftmyers.com
Website	www.cityftmyers.com/cra
County(ies)	Lee
Local Governing Authority	City of Fort Myers
Date Created/Established	Monday, September 17, 1984
Creation Documents	City Ordinances 2249, 2420, 2842, 2843, 2844 and 2845
Board Selection	Identical to Local Governing Authority
Authority to Issue Bonds	Yes
Revenue	Tax Increment Financing
Most Recent Update	Thursday, December 14, 2017
Total number of Activities Types started	4
Total number of Activities Types completed	4
Current Year Taxable Value in CRA	\$1,344,827,580.00
Actual expended increment revenue	\$5,112,630.24
Base Year Taxable Value in CRA	\$863,398,631.00
Current Year Tax Increment Value	\$481,428,949.00
Total amt. expended for low & middle income affordable housing	\$0.00

### Central Fort Myers



Total Acreage	+/- 134
Area Established	1990
Most Recent Plan Update	December 1999
Sunset Date	August 2050

### Cleveland Avenue



Total Acreage	+/- 614
Area Established	1998
Most Recent Plan Update	June 2016
Sunset Date	April 2040

### Dr. MLK, Jr. Blvd.



Total Acreage	+/- 2749
Area Established	2007
Most Recent Plan Update	September 2018
Sunset Date	January 2044

### Downtown



Total Acreage	+/- 540
Area Established	1984
Most Recent Plan Update	September 2018
Sunset Date	November 2044

### East Fort Myers



Total Acreage	+/- 1036
Area Established	2007
Most Recent Plan Update	May 2010
Sunset Date	May 2044

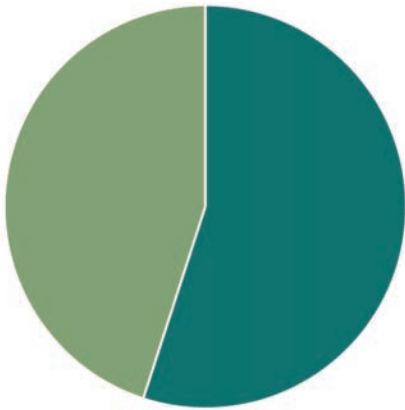
### Westwood



Total Acreage	+/- 1032
Area Established	1990
Most Recent Plan Update	January 1998
Sunset Date	August 2020

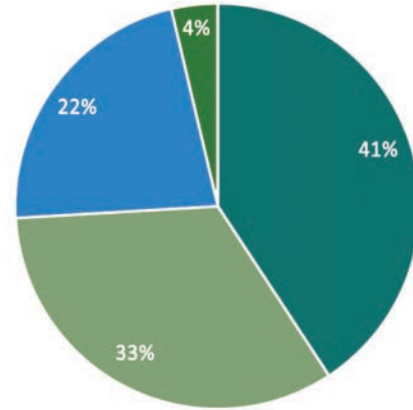
# Activities

COMPLETED (C) ACTIVITIES BY COUNT

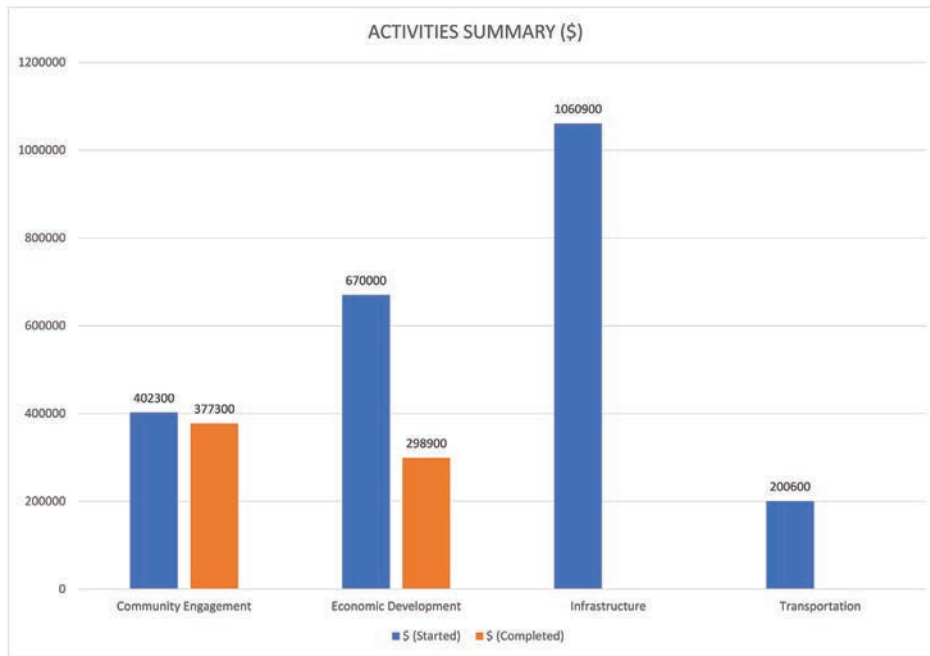


■ Community Engagement ■ Economic Development

STARTED (S) ACTIVITIES BY COUNT



■ Community Engagement ■ Economic Development  
■ Infrastructure ■ Transportation



The following is a summary of this community redevelopment agency's achievement of its redevelopment plan's goals.

Activity	Plan	Page #
Community Engagement	Downtown 2010 Cleveland Ave. 2014 Dr. MLK, Jr. 2018	4-24, 5-10, 5-40 48 4.4, 5.4, 6.2-6.14
Economic Development	Downtown 2010 Cleveland Ave. 2014 Dr. MLK, Jr. 2018	30 58 3.1, 3.4, 4.3, 4.5, 6.11-6.13
Infrastructure	Downtown 2010	101
Transportation	Downtown 2010	101

## CRA Operating Funds

Last Audit September 2019

### Balance Sheet

Total Assets	\$6,418,672
Total Liabilities	(\$739,575)
Total Fund Balance	\$5,679,097
Total Liabilities & Fund Balance	\$4,939,522

### Comparable Statement of

<b>Revenues, Expenditures &amp; Changes in Fund Balance</b>	
Total Revenues	\$1,919,943
Total Expenditures	\$3,748,572
Total Other Financing Sources (Uses)	\$2,876,429
Fund Balance September 30, 2020	\$1,047,800

# Grand Opening September 2020



The Luminary Hotel & Co., located with our downtown redevelopment area, is the newest and brightest focal point in our community. The people behind this development were guided by a vision that reached deep into the City’s rich history while looking forward to its prosperous future. In partnership with the City of Fort Myers and the Community Redevelopment Agency, Tampa-based Mainsail Lodging & Development envisioned the latest Marriott Autograph Collection property as a tribute to the colorful characters who came together to make Fort Myers. But they also wanted to be a luxurious and welcoming stage for the City’s future

luminaries to build on. As the Luminary Hotel & Co. web site explains: “More than a hotel, Luminary is a hub of excitement and discovery – a focal point where locals and travelers tap into the collective energy of a city, and a story, begun by a brilliant cast of audacious local luminaries.”

How successfully that vision was accomplished is on display at 2200 Edwards Street, where the 12-story, 243-room Luminary Hotel rises above the Caloosahatchee River. The \$92 million hotel includes a rooftop lounge, two restaurants, a coffee shop, and various meeting

rooms. The Luminary will also operate the Caloosa Sound Convention Center adjacent to the hotel property. Caloosa Sound is the rebranded, reimagined former Harborside Event Center, which has reopened after a two-year closure. The new 40,000 square foot center has gone from green and pink on the outside to a clean new black-and-white exterior. The Caloosa Sound Center will be augmented by an outdoor amphitheater being constructed across Edwards Street on the lawn of Centennial Park. The facility, which will host performances and concerts, is planned to seat up to 3,000 and is scheduled to open next May.

Nearby, in the Old Pier Building, the Oxbow restaurant, another piece of the downtown redevelopment project, will open next March. The Oxbow will feature casual dining on the first floor and banquet space on balconied second story.

The opening of the Luminary in September was the culmination of an almost decade-long process that began in 2011 when the Fort Myers City Council adopted a downtown redevelopment master plan that included a hotel next to the convention center, an amphitheater, restaurants and retail establishments on the riverfront. In August 2016, the City of Fort Myers selected Mainsail Lodging and Development to develop the project and operate the facilities. Mainsail signed a 99-year lease on the property. Mainsail worked with the Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency, whose director Michele Hylton-Terry, is proud of the partnership. “This hotel was long-awaited and has added room capacity and strengthened the area’s convention capabilities,” Hylton-Terry said. “The Luminary Hotel & Co., as part of Marriott’s Autograph Collection, presents an opportunity for global exposure for the City of Fort Myers. Area restaurants and commercial businesses will benefit from guests and conventions, events, and corporate events held at the newly remodeled convention center.” Just two of the scheduled events next year for the Caloosa Sound Center are the Edison Awards and the Florida Redevelopment Association Conference.

The development is expected to attract hotel guests and convention attendees and benefit nearby downtown businesses but even before all the facilities are fully in operation, the project has boosted the local economy. Luminary Hotel & Co. General Manager, Bob Megazzini, said the project has brought jobs both pre- and post-construction. For example, more than 70 percent of the hotel’s first new hires were from Fort Myers. Tom Albrecht, Luminary’s director of sales, told the Fort Myers News-Press that project’s business success will ripple through the City. “This is going to be a catalyst

for the redevelopment of downtown,” he said. “I think it’s going to be a boon.”

The Luminary Hotel is one of more than 180 Marriott Autograph Collection properties around the world. Mainsail Lodging & Development operates four other full-service Marriott Autograph Collection properties in Florida. But in addition to its prestige and global marketing reach as a Marriott Autograph hotel, the Luminary includes much to offer locals as well. The 243-room boutique hotel is home to the signature Silver King Ocean Brasserie and Lobby Bar, Beacon Social Drinkery rooftop lounge, Ella Mae’s Diner, and Dean Street Coffee. The hotel also features the Workshop culinary theater, an indoor and outdoor fitness facility, and a spacious pool area on the fourth floor featuring an event deck overlooking the Caloosahatchee River.

Luminary offers 8,000 square feet of adaptable indoor and outdoor function space ideal for various events and meetings and is adjacent to the neighboring Caloosa Sound Convention Center. The convention center has new lighting and sound system, bigger bathrooms, refinished floors, and its 30,000 square-foot ballrooms can be divided into up to five different smaller configurations. The Luminary Hotel & Co. and the adjoining Caloosa Sound Convention Center each recently received a prestigious 2021 Top New or Renovated Meeting Site Award from the publishers and editors of Convention South magazine, a national multimedia resource planning events in the South. Nearer the river, the Oxbow Bar & Grill will feature even more meeting and banquet space. Another community benefit is that the Caloosa Sound Amphitheater is expected to host concerts and performances, community events, and farmer’s markets.

Contributing Author:  
Kevin Allen, Destination Magazine





# Caloosa Sound Convention Center





**The Beacon Social Drinkery**



**Silver King Ocean Brasserie**



**Dean Street Coffee Roastery & Retail**



### **Ella Mae's Diner**

The Luminary Hotel & Co. is much more than a comfortable place for downtown guests to stay. From the start, the project's vision was to look to the city's future while honoring its pioneering past. Evoking the spirit of one of the community's towering pioneering figures is one of the ways the project has built on that vision. In addition to Dean Street Coffee Roastery & Retail, which opened with the hotel

and pays homage to the extension of Dean Street where Luminary now sits, the Beacon Social Drinkery, a rooftop bar with spectacular views, and the Silver King Ocean Brasserie, a gourmet seafood restaurant opening in November, the Luminary project prominently includes Ella Mae's Diner, an updated version of a classic southern diner that honors a Fort Myers legend.



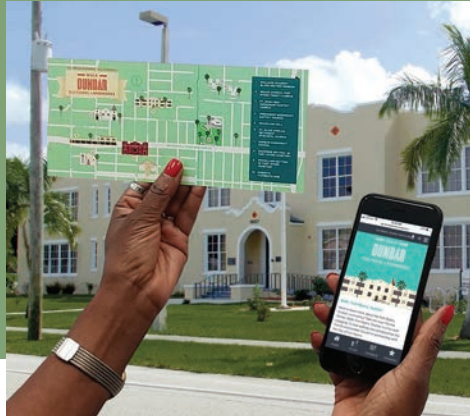
Ella Mae Piper arrived in Fort Myers with her mother around 1900, left to attend Spellman College in Atlanta and then studied chiropody in New York. She returned to Fort Myers in 1915 and began a career in business and philanthropy that continues to shape the city seven decades after her death. Known to all as Dr. Piper, she opened the first beauty salon in the city and later the Big 4 Bottling Company on Evans Avenue and what is now Dr. Ella Piper Way. The site was left to the city by Dr. Piper and is the home of the Dr. Piper Center, which serves the community's elderly and children, just as Dr. Piper intended. Every Christmas the center's lawn is the site of an annual children's party, a tradition begun by Ella Mae's mother in 1915, continued by Ella Mae, and that has grown to hundreds of boys and girls.

# Year In Review



## October 2019

Along with partners, the Fort Myers CRA won two FRA Awards for Collaboratory (Outstanding Rehabilitation) & Redevelopment Areas Boundary Review (Planning Studies).



## November 2019

Dunbar Historic Landmark Tour App was launched on November 2, bringing the community together to celebrate the history and cultural significance of Fort Myers society.



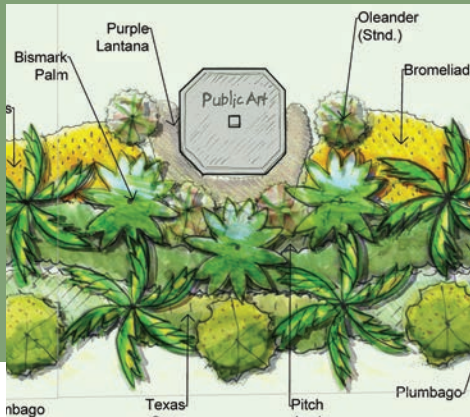
## December 2019

Phase I of City Walk broke ground. West End at City Walk, a 318-unit residential rental apartment complex with retail and Class A office space, is planned for completion in 2021.



## April 2020

CRA initiated “We Are Open” Business campaign to promote businesses open but affected by COVID-19 restrictions. COVID-19 Resource page was added to website to support community. CRA added two more newsletters. CRA staff began development of business directories for its redevelopment areas, which were published in August.



## May 2020

CRA approved a CRA-City joint venture to update and install new landscaping along Dr. MLK, Jr. Blvd. and approved the commission of a \$100,000 gateway art piece that will be both interesting and representative of the local community. This is one of the principal gateways into the City. It is the main commercial thoroughfare in the Dr. MLK, Jr. Blvd. redevelopment area.



## June 2020

A joint workshop of the Fort Myers Board of Commissioners (BOC) and Advisory Board reviewed the Agency’s Tax Increment Rebate (TIF) Program to incorporate elements that provide additional community benefit beyond the project itself. New criteria were added so applicants could achieve a higher rebate percentage while adding tangible benefits to the community. The BOC approved the changes at its June meeting.





**January 2020**

Phase I of the St. Peter Claver Place apartment complex was approved. The 214-unit affordable housing apartment complex will be built in two phases, with Phase I consisting of 136 two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments and a community building.



**February 2020**

CRA leadership attended the 2020 Florida State Senate to advocate for home rule & affordable housing.



**March 2020**

COVID-19 pandemic struck Florida. CRA operations went remote for safety. Marketing effort to help community shifted into high gear: between March 24 - June 24, the team produced 450+ items of strategic communication: productivity in marketing section rose 153%.



**July 2020**

The CRA partnered with the River District Alliance to offer free parking to support businesses operating during the pandemic restrictions. The CRA partnered with the River District Farmers Market to offer free garage parking at specific times on weekdays to encourage people to dine, shop, and enjoy our lovely Downtown again.



**August 2020**

Edwards Drive received the Downtown Streetscape treatment as a complement to the new Luminary Hotel & Co. and Caloosa Sound Convention Center projects. Enhancement included brick pavers, decorative light poles and fixtures.



**September 2020**

Ribbon cutting grand openings for both the Luminary Hotel & Co. and the Caloosa Sound Convention Center were held in mid-September. Completion of the project restored convention capabilities to the Downtown River District. Luminary Hotel & Co. also contributed to the local economy by hiring local staff members to operate the facilities.

# Royal Palm Gardens

## Formerly Jones Walker Apartments



Renovations were completed on Royal Palm Gardens Apartments and tenants returned home before Christmas. The 80-unit complex is located at 2209 Blount Street in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. redevelopment area. Built in the 1970s, the affordable housing community had fallen into extreme disrepair in both the exterior and interior of the complex. The ten two-story buildings were demolished to the studs to accommodate roof and window replacement, central air conditioning, updated plumbing and electrical, new appliances, accessibility upgrades, and landscape improvements. A long list of additional work is planned.

The community consists of one, two, and three bedroom garden-style residential units with a leasing office set on 3.71 acres of land. The Royal Palm Gardens Apartments project will receive an \$800,000 CRA rebate of the taxes generated by the project in yearly installments at a rate of 95% for 15 years.



**Bathroom Renovations  
Royal Palm Garden Apartments**



**Kitchen Renovations  
Royal Palm Garden Apartments**

The unsightly, dangerous, moldy, and infested mess that constituted a “bathroom” is now gone. Everything was torn out, including the windows, and replaced with modern, stylish fixtures and plumbing to provide residents with a comfortable, healthy, and sanitary place for themselves and their children.

Renovations of Royal Palm Garden Apartments introduced a beautiful new kitchen with new appliances including a refrigerator, stove, oven, and microwave into the upgraded cabinets and countertops. Flooring was also upgraded stylishly. The clean space will provide residents with a healthy environment in which to feed their families.

# Downtown CRA Enhanced Services Team



Edgar Mena  
Crew Leader



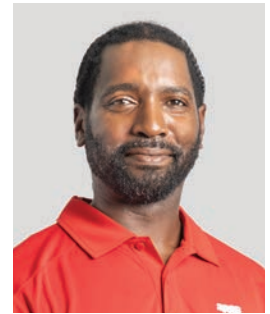
Chet Vishudanand  
Trades Worker II



Gabriel Martinez  
Service Worker I



Victor Cruz  
Service Worker I



Wendell Young  
Service Worker II

A collaboration between the City of Fort Myers and the Community Redevelopment Agency allows the CRA to provide an enhanced level of service in our Historic Downtown River District. Our four CRA Park & Recreation Service Workers are supervised by a crew leader provided by the City and together they keep our redevelopment areas clean and fosters a sense of place, making these areas inviting to businesses, residents, and visitors alike. In our Cleveland Avenue and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. redevelopment areas, these vital workers maintain the landscaped medians along our main commercial corridors and gateways to the city, US-41, Veronica S. Shoemaker and the Dr. MLK Boulevards.



## **References**

Photo Credits: City of Fort Myers, Florida Redevelopment Association (FRA), Fort Myers Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA), Google, Jerry Miller, Luminary Hotel & Co., Main Sail Video Productions, Inc., Manta Films, News Press, River District Alliance (RDA), Royal Palm Gardens/Redwood Housing, St. Peter Claver Place/National Development of America, West End at City Walk/Nick Stewart/NPS Engineering & Consulting.

This 2020 Fort Myers Community Redevelopment (CRA) Annual Report was published on March 31, 2021. Edits or revisions may occur without notice.





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