



Finding of Blight Report

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## **Overview**

Hillsboro Boulevard has been identified by the City of Coconut Creek City Commission as a high priority area for redevelopment. As such, it is the proposed project area sought after for future Broward County redevelopment funds. Hillsboro Boulevard was historically developed as a commercial district. Over time, many of the undeveloped commercial parcels along the corridor were acquired by Broward County through the 2000 Land Preservation Bond program and the corridor now contains several large natural preserve areas. While this has created the potential for a very environmentally friendly area, it has also greatly contributed to its commercial underutilization. Retail tenants often cite the need for a cultural mass to attract customers. Major commercial parcels not acquired by Broward County were converted to residential uses which further stifled commercial development along the corridor. While there exists thriving businesses at advantageous locations, there are also plazas with high vacancy rates, boarded buildings, non-conforming uses, and overall conditions that remain due to this underutilization.

Further, many of the plats were planned utilizing a suburban development model; they were designed to be stand-alone buildings that do not foster cross-connectivity and a traditional downtown walking environment. Through a coordinated redevelopment plan, we intend to restore the deteriorated conditions and tie together the expansive natural areas.

Coconut Creek was developed as a premier community for families with excellent schools and parks, but it falls short providing societal and entertainment infrastructure, which builds long-term community devotion and loyalty. This is a deterrent to young professionals who might have grown up in Coconut Creek, but are less inclined to move back to establish their career and family. It is also true for older retirees who would like to move into a smaller home in the City. This report indicates the existence of multiple blighting conditions such as inadequate street layout, stagnant growth concerning ad valorem tax purposes, faulty lot layout, and unsanitary conditions.

## **Direction**

In early 2016, the City of Coconut Creek City Commission approved Resolution 2016-001, which authorized consulting services to be provided by Dorsky + Yue International LLC related to assisting in the development of a vision for the Hillsboro Corridor Redevelopment Area (the "Corridor"). Dorsky + Yue International focused on an overall vision for the Corridor and redevelopment opportunities within the subject area that may qualify for the Broward County Redevelopment Program (BRP). There have been two

community meetings involving stakeholders. The City recently invested \$277,000 on median enhancements along Hillsboro Boulevard.

As part of implementing this vision, the City of Coconut Creek intends to seek assistance through the Broward Redevelopment Grant Program (BRP). Funding for the BRP was approved by the Board of County Commissioners on June 6, 2017. The Board allocated \$8,500,000 to the BRP from the BRP FY 2018 funding cycle. Funding is available through the Broward Redevelopment Program for up to \$1,000,000 per municipality/CRA per funding cycle for property acquisition, public improvements projects, or eligible interior build-out for economic development purposes not to exceed \$150,000 or 50% of the interior build-out cost, whichever is less. The grant is designed for areas designated by municipal or county resolution or ordinance defining the boundary and declaring that the area has blighted conditions described in Chapter 163, Part III, Florida Statutes.

### Florida Statutes

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, endanger life or property or are leading to economic distress; 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.

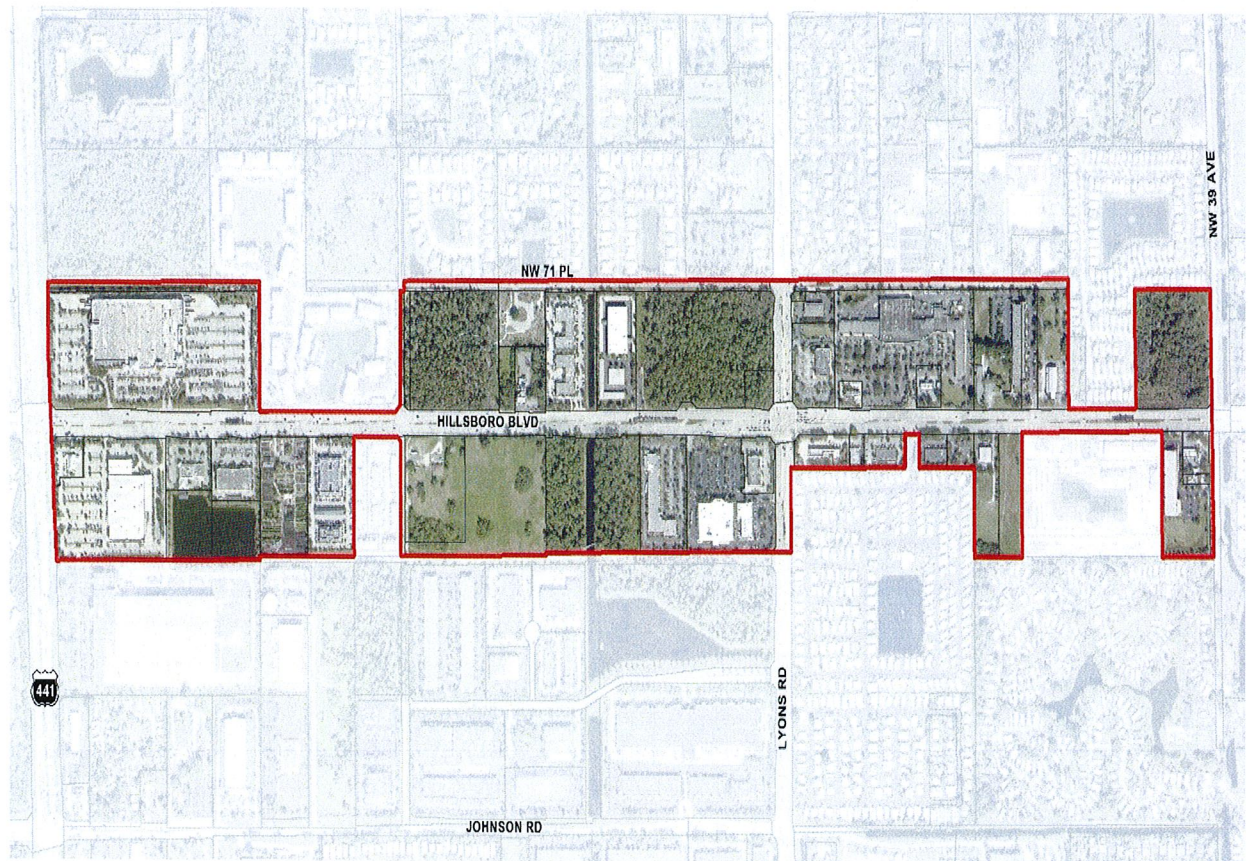
(j) Incidence of crime in the area higher than in the remainder of the county or municipality.

(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.
- (n) Governmentally owned property with adverse environmental conditions caused by a public or private entity.
- (o) A substantial number or percentage of properties damaged by sinkhole activity which have not been adequately repaired or stabilized.

## Introduction

The Finding of Blight Report is based on the overriding premise that the Corridor suffers due to underutilization created by the unanticipated impacts of large county acquisitions. This report offers a detailed overview of conditions that justify a finding of blighted conditions. The following sections are arranged in order of the required factors pursuant to Chapter 163, Part III F.S. and include key factors that serve to define the Hillsboro Corridor Redevelopment Area as “blighted”. By eliminating these “blighted” conditions, the City of Coconut Creek can pro-actively initiate community redevelopment for the Hillsboro Boulevard Redevelopment Area. Blighted conditions that do not apply have been omitted from the report.



**Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout, parking facilities, roadways, bridges, or public transportation facilities**

Hillsboro Boulevard is the primary roadway in the Hillsboro Corridor Redevelopment Area. The adjacent parcels are characterized by various land uses, which include commercial, residential, and natural preserve areas. A major deficiency is insufficient connectivity between the land uses noted above. Hillsboro Boulevard itself consists of six lanes and carries a substantial amount of vehicular traffic. Overhead utility wires, inadequate pedestrian amenities, and unsightly landscaping characterize this thoroughfare.

Buildings and their setbacks lack proper scale with the extensive thoroughfare. Every aspect of Hillsboro Boulevard directs vehicles through and out of the area. Most commercial structures and uses along Hillsboro Boulevard are setback in individual lot layouts, thus creating “strip commercial” along the corridor. Hillsboro Marketplace is the major shopping plaza along Hillsboro Boulevard and has high vacancy rates in part due to the faulty parking facilities and parcel layout. Hillsboro Boulevard and the Marketplace would benefit tremendously from pedestrian/transportation enhancements.

The finding of defective or adequate street layout and roadways’ is further supported by a lack of a viable, comprehensive system of accessible sidewalks, bicycle facilities, multi-modal facilities, the absence of streetscaping, pedestrian lighting, traffic calming devices, and wayfinding signage. These are just some examples that may hamper new investment opportunities and may contribute to the further decline of the area.



**Aggregate assessed values of real property in the area for ad valorem tax purposes have failed to show any appreciable increase**

In an effort to identify the legitimate struggle with property values in the area, City staff performed a basic comparison of property values for the Hillsboro Boulevard Redevelopment area against a similar corridor in Deerfield Beach, both with similar uses and with an identical overall area measurement. The data demonstrates the impact on the area from the County's acquisitions of preserve lands. This discrepancy between values for the different areas is not only attributable to the lack of development due to the preserves, but also the impact these passive uses have on generating interest from the private development community on the remaining parcels.

City	Square Miles	# of Parcels	Taxable Value
Coconut Creek	0.32	78	\$124,000,000
Deerfield Beach	0.32	82	\$234,000,000

*\* The first component of the redevelopment plan provides for the acquisition of the property located adjacent to Deenies Hideaway. The property acquisition is designed to clean unsanitary conditions while creating a viable redevelopment opportunity. This opportunity would allow for lot assemblage and economic development. The proposed assembled lots currently pay \$29,956.35 in taxes. A nearby commercial property that is smaller in size pays \$95,000 in taxes. The Hillsboro Corridor Redevelopment Project will have the assembled lots on the tax roll within 3 years after the execution of the ILA.*

**Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness.**

Throughout the Hillsboro Corridor Redevelopment Area, unique conditions exist on developed and vacant land where consistency with the City's Land Development Code cannot be achieved. Vacant and developed substandard parcels with limited or narrow frontage are wedged between existing large-scale development and preservation parcels making site assembly virtually impossible. In many instances, these nonconforming parcels fail to meet minimum standards for lot area and site dimensions.

Existing businesses are at a disadvantage since they may not be able to expand or perform substantial renovations to existing structures and comply with other development regulations such as parking or open space requirements.

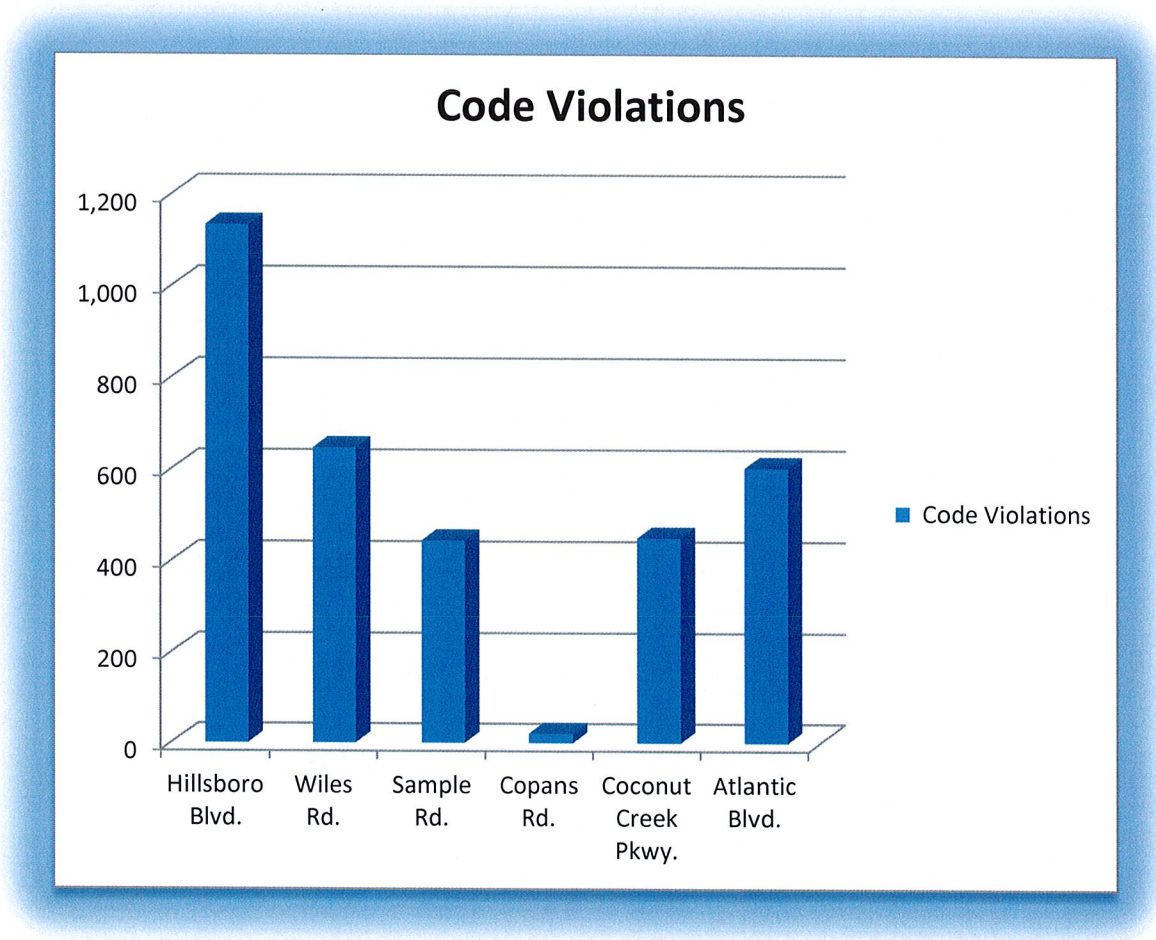
Some parcels along the Corridor are long and narrow, forcing commercial plazas to be oriented with storefronts facing away from Hillsboro Boulevard. Businesses that may depend on drive-by traffic have little or no exposure to merchandise or signage.





## Unsanitary or unsafe conditions

The City of Coconut Creek is a well-planned city with a unique environmental image utilizing strategic initiatives, focusing on inviting aesthetics, environmental preservation, public safety, and fiscal responsibility. Although the city is well designed, unsanitary and unsafe conditions exist within the City limits and our along our major corridors due to age and in some cases, neglect (see below). A code violation comparison along these corridors clearly indicates unsafe and unsanitary conditions located along Hillsboro Boulevard. Failure to obtain a building permit, failing to obtain a business license, unhealthy landscaping and poorly maintained sidewalks are some examples of the violations accounted for in the chart.



\* Data was collected from 11/9/2006 - 11/9/2016

## **Deterioration of site or other improvements**

The Hillsboro Corridor Redevelopment Area contains unsanitary and unsafe conditions. The supporting infrastructure in the redevelopment area contains vacant lots, vacant buildings, non-conforming structures, neglected landscaping, cracked sidewalks, and inadequate lighting for nighttime pedestrian activity. These deteriorating influences contribute to the stagnation of economic development. The continuation of these conditions without intervention will inevitably cause further decline and blight.

Deteriorated buildings in an area are generally an indication of a lack of private investment in maintaining the integrity and value of existing development or redevelopment. The presence of deteriorated buildings impairs economic growth in a community by negatively impacting the investment environment. A clear indication of stagnant growth can be seen at Hillsboro Marketplace. This outdated commercial plaza has twenty-three possible bays for businesses, with only eight currently occupied at the time of this report.

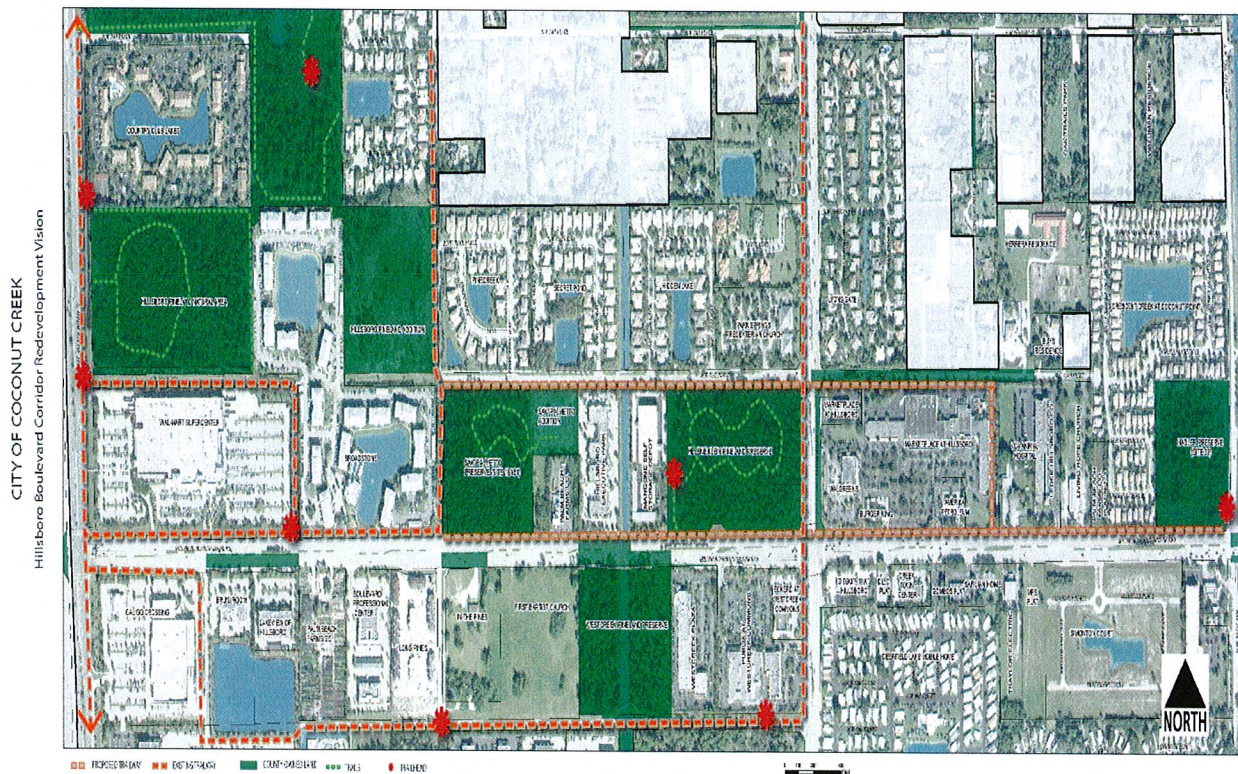
Fieldwork conducted by the Department of Sustainable Development confirmed the existence of these deteriorated conditions throughout the Corridor. This included not only the physical condition of structures, but also aged landscaping in poor health, vacant lots, and inadequate opportunities for pedestrian activity. In addition, deteriorated buildings have created additional expense for the community due to the need for increased code enforcement personnel and inspections. Without intervention, the area is subject to further deterioration.



## Inadequate and outdated building density patterns

Hillsboro Boulevard is a major east-west corridor in Broward County transporting users from the east side of the County all the way west to State Road 7/US441; intersecting multiple, major north-south corridors along the way. As Hillsboro Boulevard enters Coconut Creek from the east, there is an obvious and immediate lack of development due to the County acquisition of sensitive ecological land known as Crescent Trail Natural Area. Moving west along Hillsboro Boulevard through to State Road 7, three additional county preserves are present including Helene Klein Pineland Preserve, West Creek Pineland Natural Area, and Saw Palmetto Natural Area. While the City welcomes the conservation achievements with these acquisitions, these preserves constitute over thirty-eight acres of land that could have been developed with office and commercial uses. In turn, these sites would have provided a strong continuity of development in the northern part of the City, allowing for a deeply robust and much needed transit system which was lost due to a lack of adequate density and a cohesive urban design.

Strengthening this corridor with a new vision, renovated properties, and community support will invigorate the existing uses and generate a stronger overall appeal which will complete the development of this vital part of the City. Providing a connection between the preserves not only utilizes this beautiful, natural feature, it provides the continuity that has been lacking along the Hillsboro Boulevard Corridor.



**Residential and commercial vacancy rates higher in the area than in the remainder of the county or municipality**



Along Hillsboro Boulevard, commercial vacancy rates are high. The area includes three commercial properties that are completely vacant and one plaza with extraordinarily high vacancy rates. These vacant properties include Deenies Hideaway, Workingman's Nursery, and the former VCA animal hospital. Each of the buildings on these parcels are not only vacant but are non-conforming structures as well. Hillsboro Marketplace has twenty-three possible bays for businesses. In November of 2016, only eight businesses were occupied. The presence of these vacant commercial properties negatively impacts economic development and deters private investment.

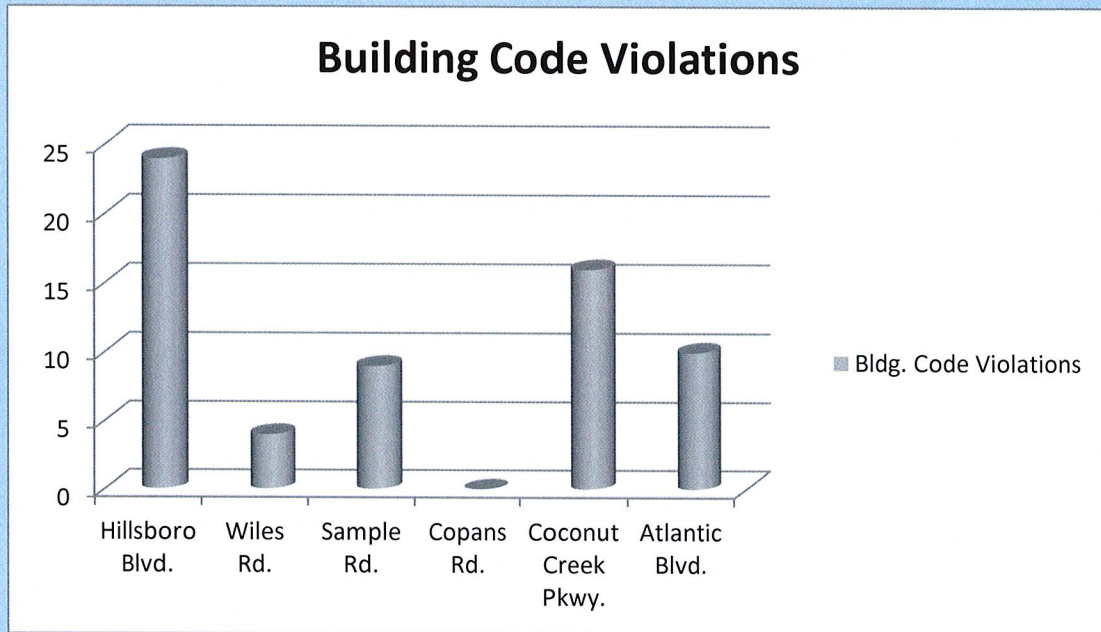


**Incidence of crime in the area higher than in the remainder of the county or municipality**

<b>Crime</b>	<b>Hillsboro Blvd.</b>	<b>Sample Rd.</b>	<b>Wiles Rd.</b>
Accident/Driving While Intoxicated	5	9	2
Aggravated Assault	4	0	5
Aggravated Battery	6	1	4
Battery- Simple	56	11	49
Burglary	37	6	20
Child Abuse	15	3	20
Fraud (All)	72	4	15
Homicide (Attempted)	1	0	0
Driving While Intoxicated	13	67	6
Trespass	54	22	11
Vehicle Theft	12	17	11
Narcotics Violation	60	32	26
Robbery	5	2	4
Sexual Battery	5	1	1
Theft	517	88	86
Disorderly Conduct/Intoxification	2	0	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>263</b>

The above data was collected from the period 1/1/2013-11/10/2016. The data compares the crime along three of Coconut Creek's main thoroughfares. The data clearly indicates a higher "incidence of crime" along Hillsboro Boulevard relative to other areas of the municipality. The comparison of Sample Road, Wiles Road and Hillsboro Boulevard were used because all three have similarities: All thoroughfares begin and end at the same crossroads and all three thoroughfares have similar commercial to residential ratios.

**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**

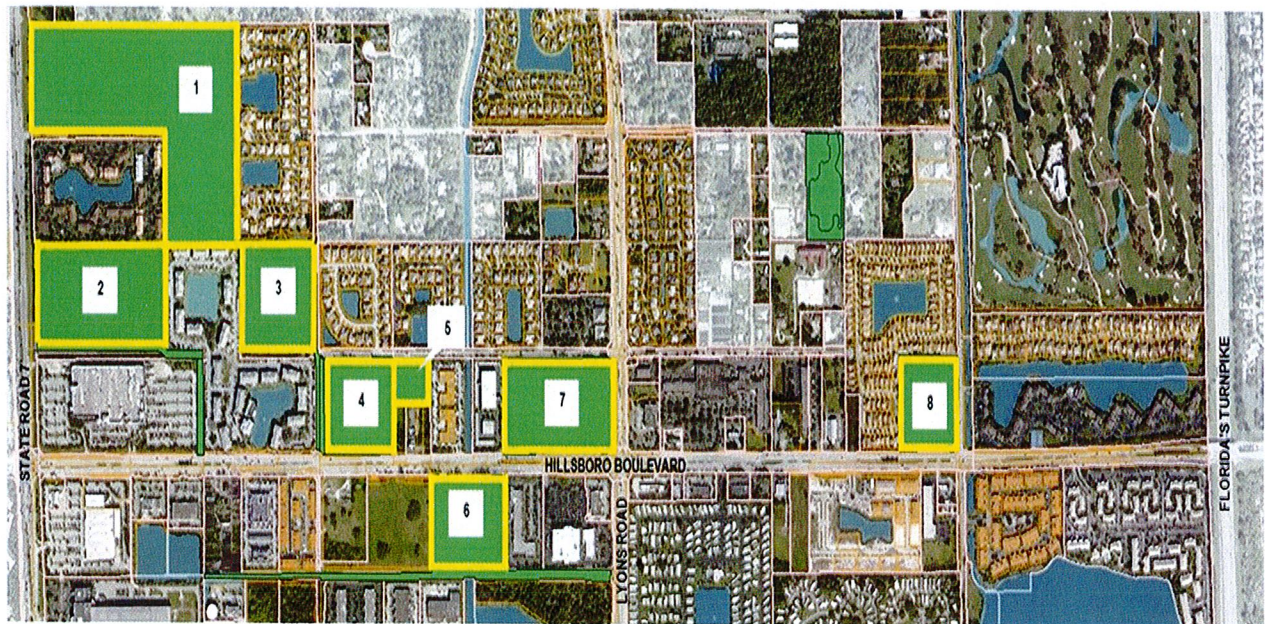


The above data was collected from the period 1/1/2013-11/10/2016. The data compares the number of building code violations along Coconut Creek's major commercial thoroughfares. The data clearly indicates that there are a greater number of violations of the Florida Building Code (FBC) along Hillsboro Boulevard. The main purpose of the building code is to protect public health, safety, and general welfare. Redeveloping the Corridor would decrease future building code violations, thereby improving public health, safety, and general welfare. Many of the structures along Hillsboro Boulevard are approaching the forty-years mark which will require a building safety inspection pursuant to Broward County Amendments to the FBC. The age of these properties warrant remediation in the near future to ensure the safety of the community.



**Governmentally owned property with adverse environmental conditions caused by a public or private entity**

The environmental preserves, which were purchased by Broward County, do not have any adverse environmental conditions however, they do cause an issue with connectivity of the parcels along Hillsboro Boulevard and contribute to the lack of tax base along the corridor. The prior discussions on the various factors contributed to the finding of blighted conditions are clearly connected to the abundance of governmentally owned property along the corridor. As stated throughout this report, the City welcomes and promotes a strong environmental presence, but is faced with a unique redevelopment challenge with the unintended consequences of these acquisitions through the years.



1. Hillsboro Pineland
2. Hillsboro Pineland
3. Hillsboro Pineland Add.
4. Saw Palmetto Preserve
5. Saw Palmetto Add.
6. West Creek Pineland Preserve
7. Helene Klein Pineland Preserve
8. Hadler Preserve