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# Doing Well by Doing Good: Using Water Quality Improvements in Redevelopment Projects

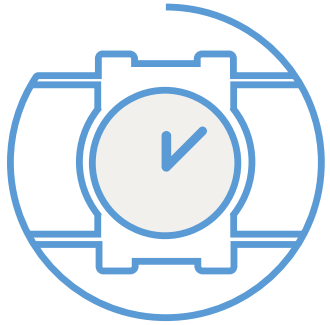
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Leigh Scrabis, Fort Myers CRA



# SUMMARY POINTS

## ROAD MAP FOR OUR JOURNEY



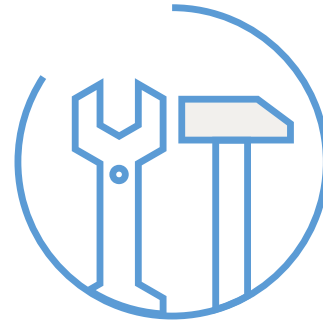
### 1) REDEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

Aging commercial corridor with small lots lacking depth after road was six-laned. Difficult to redevelopment land still meet new stormwater treatment requirements.



### 2) GOLF + WQ TREATMENT = GOLD

Golf course renovations and the opportunities that resulted in the development of the nutrient credit bank .



### 3) THE BORING LEGAL BITS

The Caloosahatchee River is an impaired water body and any new development must provide net improvement to the river's water quality.



### 4) POWERFUL ECONOMIC TOOL

Stormwater credits serve as flexible economic development incentive. Who needs a one size fits all approach when they can tailor the level of support to the project?

# Urban or suburban? Stormwater is still the answer

The first Phase of the Riverfront Development Plan included a [River Basin](#), which was designed to solve several critical issues concerning development of the underused riverfront area such as:

- attracting key businesses,
- managing storm water runoff into the Caloosahatchee River, and
- enhancing public space along the river for daily use and special events.





# RIVER BASIN

The basin improves the quality of the stormwater being discharged into the Caloosahatchee River by incorporating a filtering system, aerating fountains, and oil/water separation. The basin provides treatment for 15 acres and created 1,200 “new” linear feet of riverfront.



Basin is sloped to provide a littoral planting shelf



Weir below pedestrian walkway



Constructing the “floating” walkway over the weir.



Aerating fountains



# ITERATIVE PROCESS

STORMWATER IS THE SOLUTION TO DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN EITHER AN URBAN OR SUBURBAN PROCESS

- Started with an Urban project 1<sup>st</sup> time out of the gate
- Next time, took a suburban approach





# AGING COMMERCIAL CORRIDOR

## COMMON PROBLEM ACROSS THE NATION

- FDOT widened U.S. 41 to six-lanes with no thought was given to the negative collateral damage that ensued.
- Cars must back into oncoming traffic.
- Under current code, insufficient space within the parcel itself to treat stormwater.
- Site assembly for larger redevelopment projects isn't necessarily a solution either, because assembled parcels would lack depth causing a developer to be forced to buy a parcel specifically to treat stormwater runoff.
- 65,000 cars travel this road daily (95% pass-through)



Typical shallow parcel on Cleveland Avenue/U.S. 41

# CONSTRAINED SITE LEADS TO INSPIRATION

## HOSPITAL PLANS EXPANSION TO MEET NEEDS OF LEVEL 1 TRAUMA CENTER

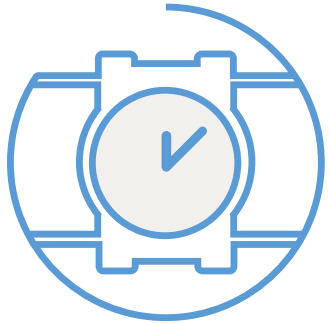
- 01 CRA wants to create a Medical District
- 02 Renovation and expansion planned at Lee Memorial
- 03 Required stormwater treatment limiting site build-out
- 04 Shared stormwater system would alleviate constraint
- 05 CRA looking for ways to encourage revitalization of 41
- 06 The idea sticks! The quest begins!



Lee Memorial Hospital

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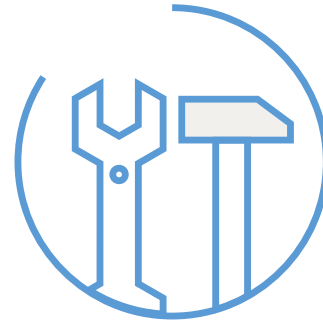
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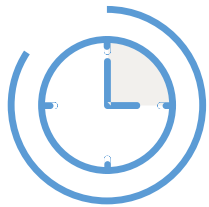


# WHY THIS WORKS



Challenge finding site in the correct location

- Size limitation
- Topographical aspect
- Hospital located in Cleveland Sub-area 1



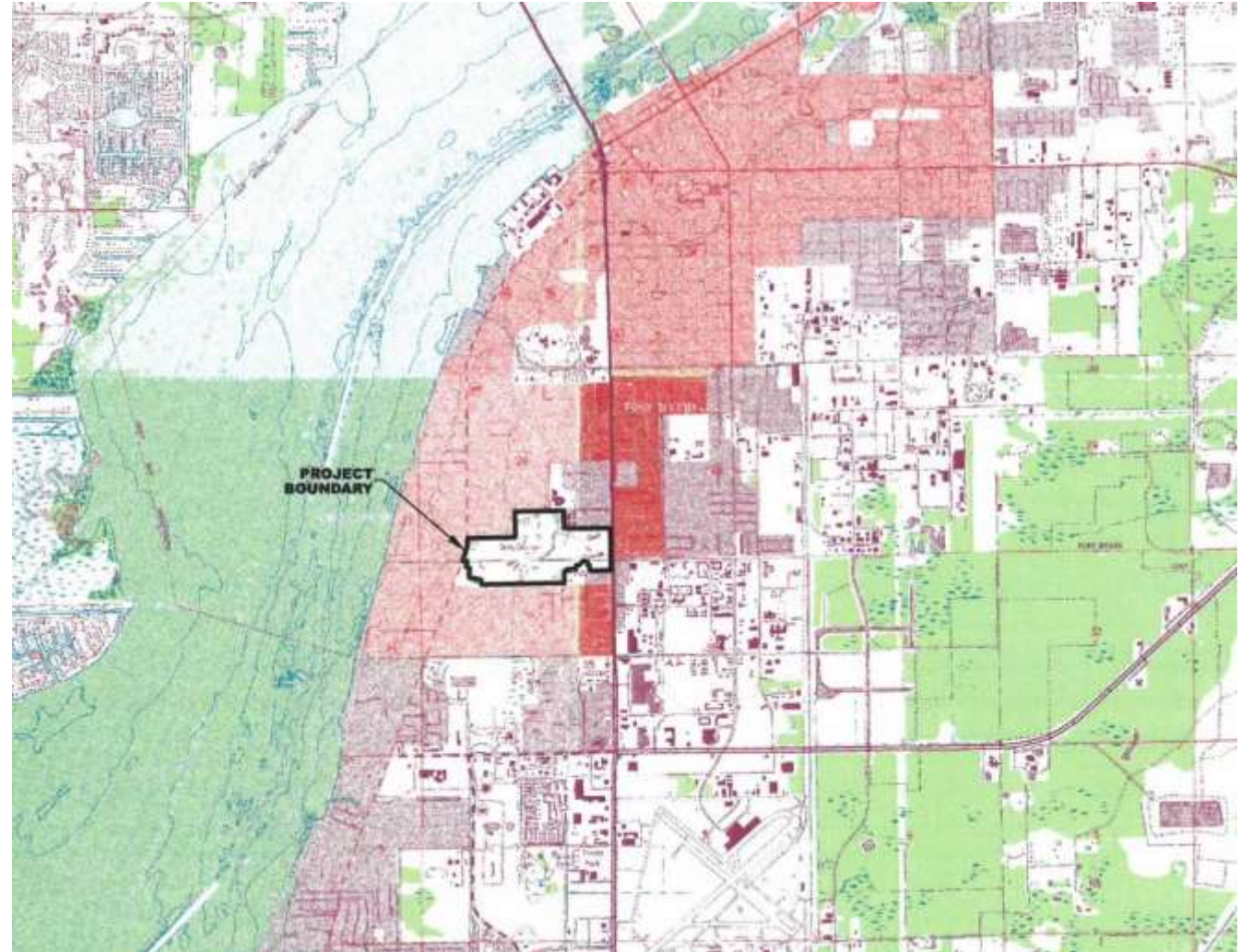
CRA/City Partnership

- City has the land, CRA has the need
- Project already in City's CIP, led to 3-yr delay
- City decided to redesign golf course



Out of the Box Idea

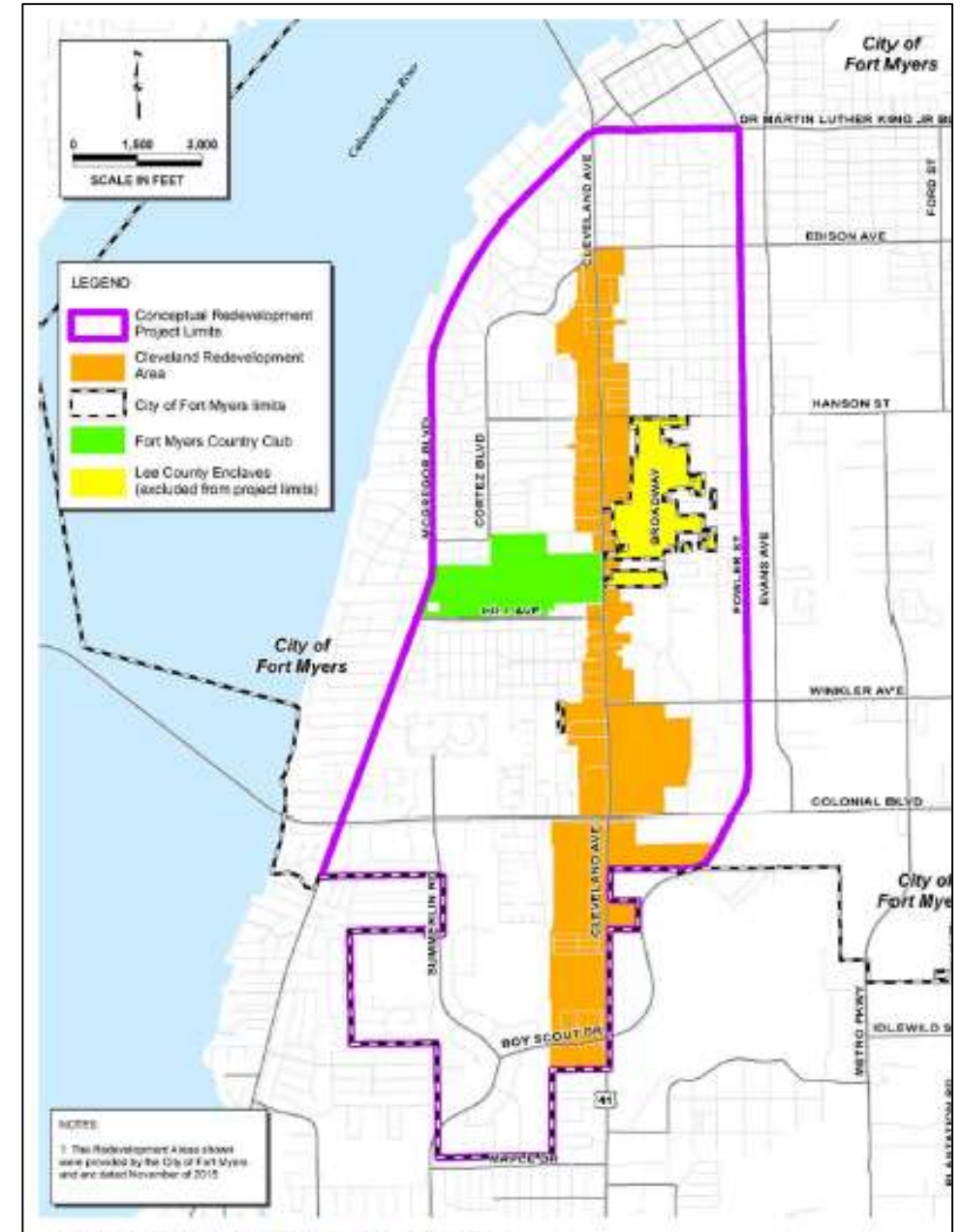
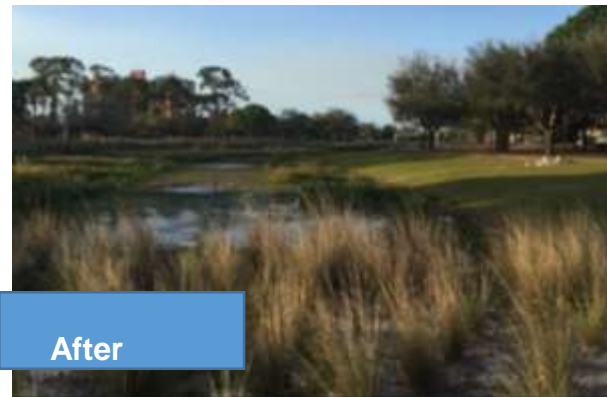
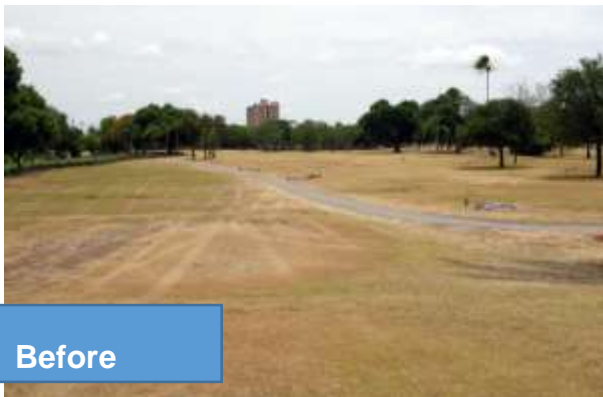
- All basins discharge to same impaired water body
- Ultimate goal to reduce nitrogen levels in Caloosahatchee River



# STORMWATER RETROFIT

## A NEW WAY TO ENCOURAGE REDEVELOPMENT

- Cleveland Avenue/U.S.41
  - Six-lane commercial corridor, vacant storefronts, barren parking lots
  - Parcels are narrow and lack depth
  - Inability to treat stormwater hinders redevelopment efforts
- Century old municipal golf course
  - Bisects U.S. 41 corridor
  - Canal bisects golf course
  - Extensive renovation needed to alleviate flooding problems and allows golf course to catch up with new technology
- City has a mandate by DEP to reduce nitrogen levels
  - Canal discharges to an impaired water body





# PUBLIC-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIP

## ONE ECONOMICAL SOLUTION TO TWO PROBLEMS

The Partnership allowed the CRA and the City to use a stormwater retrofit project to:

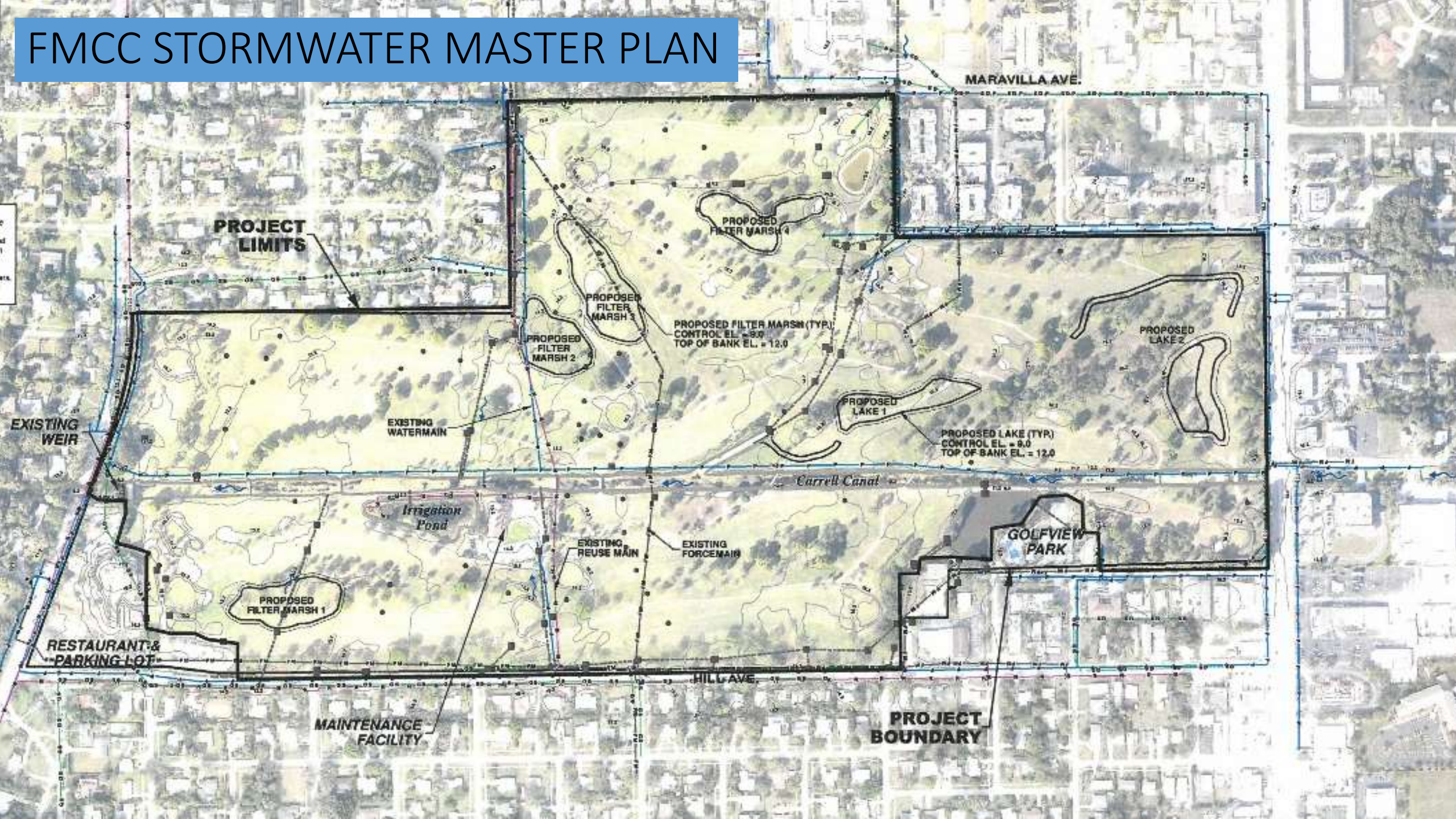
- Provide offsite stormwater treatment for the adjacent commercial corridor WHILE reducing nitrogen levels in the canal BEFORE the water is discharged to the river.
- Utilize a complete golf course renovation to solve flooding problems, alleviating down time and course closures.

Perfect solution since it will benefit the environment, stimulate economic growth, spur redevelopment, generate additional TIF and honor community history.





# FMCC STORMWATER MASTER PLAN





# How the Program Works

As an economic development incentive, developers can either be sold or given offsite stormwater credits from the treatment system at the golf course that they may use instead of having to build their own onsite water quality treatment system.

When the CRA heard that the City of Fort Myers was planning to redesign the Fort Myers Country Club golf course, the CRA asked to partner with the City so that additional stormwater treatment and volume could be built into the existing system, thereby creating a stormwater “mitigation” bank that could be used to incentivize redevelopment along Cleveland Avenue/U.S. 41.

**Cleveland Avenue  
Redevelopment  
Parcel**



**Offsite Stormwater Credits  
from Golf Course**



**New Development**



Before



Leapa/Pictometry

After



# FIRST OUT OF THE GATE

GRAND CENTRAL APARTMENTS SERVES AS THE CATALYTIC PROJECT TO JUMPSTART REVITALIZATION OF U.S. 41

- Puts a vacant site back on the tax roles
- Agreed to reduce tax rebate request from 95% to an average of 80% in exchange for use of offsite stormwater credits
- 280 market rate unit apartment complex
- 15,000 square feet of commercial development
- Dog park, bocce ball courts and pool
- Provides much-needed rentals



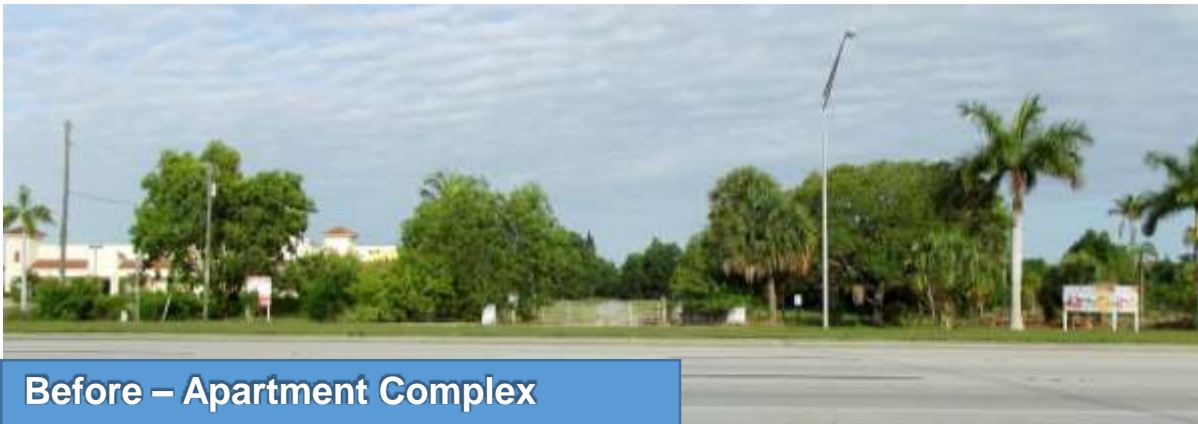
# OFFSITE TREATMENT ALLOWS FOR MAXIMIZE BUILDOUT

Based on a study by the National Resource Network, the City is experiencing a housing shortage.

For example, for every 100 people needing an apartment in Lee County, there are only nine apartments available.

This project will help address that housing shortage by adding market rate units into the rental pool.

Cleveland Redevelopment Plan recommends mixed use projects and providing buffer between U.S. 41 and residential areas near the corridor. This projects serves as a hybrid of those recommendations.



# SALE OF LAND TO CITY

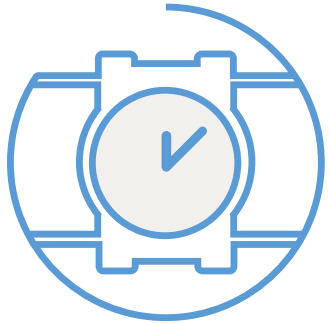
THE CRA WAS ABLE TO LEVERAGE ITS INVESTMENT IN ONE MORE CAPACITY.

- Regional Sports Complex is experiencing an extreme parking shortage.
- Onsite stormwater treatment will not be required due to the use of the Offsite Credits
- Developer has agreed to sell the western portion of the site to the City.
- City will partner with the CRA to reroute the canal
  - Providing attenuation for Grand Central
  - Construct a much-needed parking lot for the adjoining Sam Fleishman Regional Sports Complex
  - Provide additional water quality treatment for the water before it is discharged to the river



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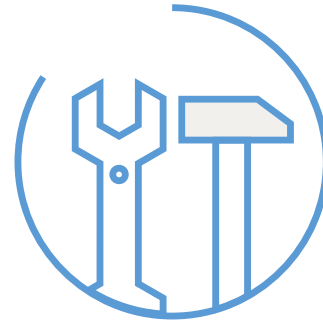
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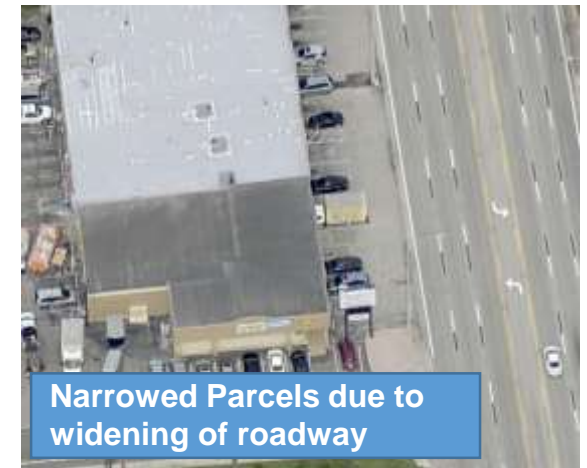
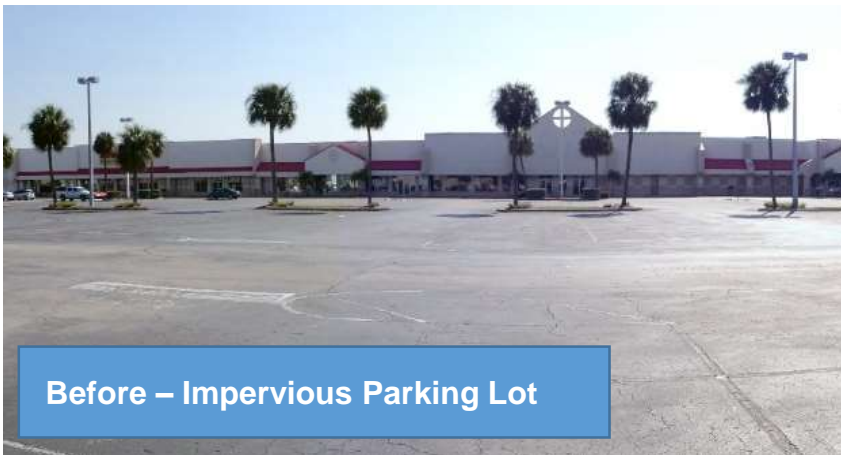
# SETTING THE “STORMWATER” STAGE

Prior to the mid-1970s, development in Florida wasn't regulated to protect water quality. After the adoption of the Florida Water Resources Act, new projects were required to install surface water management systems to provide water quality treatment for stormwater leaving the new project. Prior to those requirements, projects typically did not treat stormwater leaving the project. Stormwater left the project site, either through a pipe or a ditch and took any pollutants on the project site, including excess nutrients into a water body, in this case the Caloosahatchee River.

Fifty years down the road, the Caloosahatchee River is a protected water body and we now have the necessary environmental standards in place to restore its water quality. Those standards are very important for our area's environmental and economic health, but these standards also can be an economic impairment to redevelopment.

Redeveloping the commercial corridor is challenging when the available properties do not have the space to effectively treat stormwater to meet the standards and, in fact provide for net improvement of the river's water quality. Since onsite stormwater treatment can require a large area, only a few large shopping centers in the corridor have enough space to meet the standards. For example, the company redeveloping a dark shopping center as a furniture store, the required stormwater retrofit changed the site from a big black, impervious “sea of asphalt” to a beautifully-landscaped parking lot with pervious green space.

**However, what happens to the small, shallow lots such as the one shown in the picture on the bottom right?**





# Nutrient-Removal System Improves Impaired **Caloosahatchee River**

What really sets the Nutrient Removal System apart from others is that it removes excess nutrients when it treats runoff and provides an accounting mechanism to establish and verify the exchange of effective nutrient removal actions. This nutrient credit bank actually encourages re-development and improves the Caloosahatchee River's water to help support to Fort Myers' water-oriented tourism economy.

The project provides a net improvement in the Tidal Caloosahatchee drainage basin, where the CRA has already invested heavily in the water quality of the riverfront and the downtown. Regardless of which of the three sub-basins discharge the water, all of them flow into the same water body making the effects of the project and the corresponding offsite credits a huge driver for revitalization efforts.



**Fort Myers Riverfront**



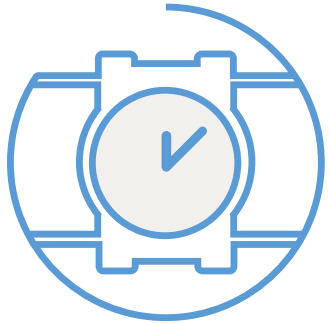
**Golf Course Nutrient-Removal System**



**Downtown Detention Basin also improves Runoff  
Water Quality into Caloosahatchee River**

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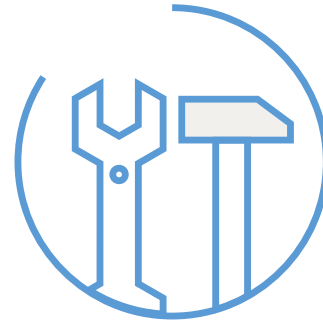
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# WHAT KIND OF INCENTIVE

## OPTION 1 – BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Incentivize a specific type of use to relocate into the redevelopment area or into a particular geographic location.

## OPTION 2 – EXCEPTIONAL STANDARD

Used to incentivize a developer to go above and beyond code requirements. Credits could be given for exceeding landscaping requirements, exceptional architecture, or incorporating sustainable practices.

## OPTION 3 – FIRST COME, FIRST SERVE

Used to incentivize a developer to go above and beyond code requirements. Credits could be given for exceeding landscaping requirements, exceptional architecture, sustainable practices, etc.

Credits could be sold to a property owner or they provided at a reduced cost or even no cost as part of an incentive package. Annual maintenance costs could be addressed similarly.



MANGROVE DESIGN IN RAILING



## Cleveland Avenue Offsite Stormwater Credits

# Leveraging Project Funding

- **Cleveland Avenue Redevelopment Trust Fund.** Funding for the Cleveland Avenue Offsite Stormwater Credits program used \$1.3 million of tax increment funding from the Cleveland Avenue redevelopment trust fund.
- **Saving Money through Partnership.** By partnering with the City of Fort Myers, the CRA was able to maximize efficiencies by using the same engineer and contractor. This saved money on design, mobilization, permitting fees, and allowed the CRA to obtain better construction pricing due to the larger size of the total project.
- **Sustainability.** Due to the fact that the lakes, filter marshes and detention ponds were all designed and built to provide excess volume, all dirt excavated was used to provide elevation changes in the golf course. Therefore, no dirt needed to be imported for purposes of the golf course project or exported as a result of excavation for the stormwater system.
- **Shifts responsibility.** By using the offsite credits, the developer is able to shift the responsibility of maintenance to the City/CRA. While they will be asked for annual operating costs, the developer will not be responsible for the day-to-day upkeep.
- **Savings of Potential Land Purchase.** Rather than purchasing land, the CRA was able to construct the project on land already owned by the City of Fort Myers, which allowed the CRA to not only realize the savings of a potential land purchase but to retrofit and expand an existing stormwater system instead of starting from scratch.
- **Avoids lost opportunity costs.** The project can leverage the CRA/City's investment of time and money to obtain the Environmental Resource Permit (ERP). When using the offsite credits, the project will only need to modify the City's ERP versus going through the lengthy process of designing a stormwater system and obtaining an individual permit for their own project. **A modification will enjoy no design costs, lower permitting fees and a huge saving in time. It will also preserve the developer's ability to use 100% of land for the building(s) and supporting infrastructure that can serve as amenities.** For example, in the case of Grand Central Luxury Apartments, the project can now include a dog park and car wash area.

# STORMWATER RETROFIT = ECONOMIC GENERATOR



BOTH THE LUMINARY HOTEL AND THE GRAND CENTRAL LUXURY APARTMENTS ARE EXPECTED TO EACH HAVE TOTAL PROJECT COSTS WHICH EXCEED \$50 MILLION.



# REPLICATE ME! DUPLICATING THE PROGRAM ELSEWHERE

ANY COMMUNITY that has significant areas that developed prior to 1975 (or even areas that have yet to develop) can create their own nutrient bank. .

Allows a CRA/City to come back and redesign or renovate an existing open-space area AND include this sort of stormwater credits project. Could be a park, an area the CRA is redeveloping, ....





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## Questions?

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