

CHAPTER 1  
ACTIVATION STRATEGY:  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT IN THE RIVERWALK DISTRICT REPORT



# INTRODUCTION | Bringing Life and Activity to the Riverwalk

## BACKGROUND

The Riverwalk District Arts & Entertainment (A&E) / Public Realm Plan was initiated as an effort to improve and enhance the Riverwalk and the blocks north and south of the New River by accomplishing the following objectives:

- Strengthen and expand the identity and presence of arts, cultural and entertainment uses within the Riverwalk District;
- Create lively, safe, attractive and comfortable public spaces, that draw people and activity to the River; and
- Introduce a management strategy for operating, marketing, programming, evaluating, improving, and ensuring the sustainability of the Riverwalk District.

As recent planning for Downtown Fort Lauderdale has highlighted, the city and specifically the areas surrounding the New River are poised to achieve a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. All of the ingredients are in place: a publicly accessible waterfront; outstanding arts and entertainment destinations; successful retail corridors; a critical mass of Downtown population from recent housing and commercial developments and future development potential. However, while individually successful, these assets are not yet interconnected in a way that allows the Downtown as a whole to match the vibrancy of other successful urban centers. Some of the challenges are the result of design – roads designed to favor traffic, inhospitable pedestrian conditions, parks that feel isolated and sometimes unsafe, and gaps in the urban fabric. Others stem from land use patterns – such as government buildings on the waterfront, or the unsuccessful multilevel Riverfront retail complex. The Broward Center for Performing Arts was unfortunately designed to get visitors in and out of the facility and parking decks with as little contact with the city as possible, resulting in a significant loss of potential spending Downtown. With the lack of active land uses and connections to surrounding buildings on the Riverwalk, the park system, while very successful for large events, remains somewhat isolated and has yet to become a focus for the daily life of residents – Fort Lauderdale’s “Central Park.”

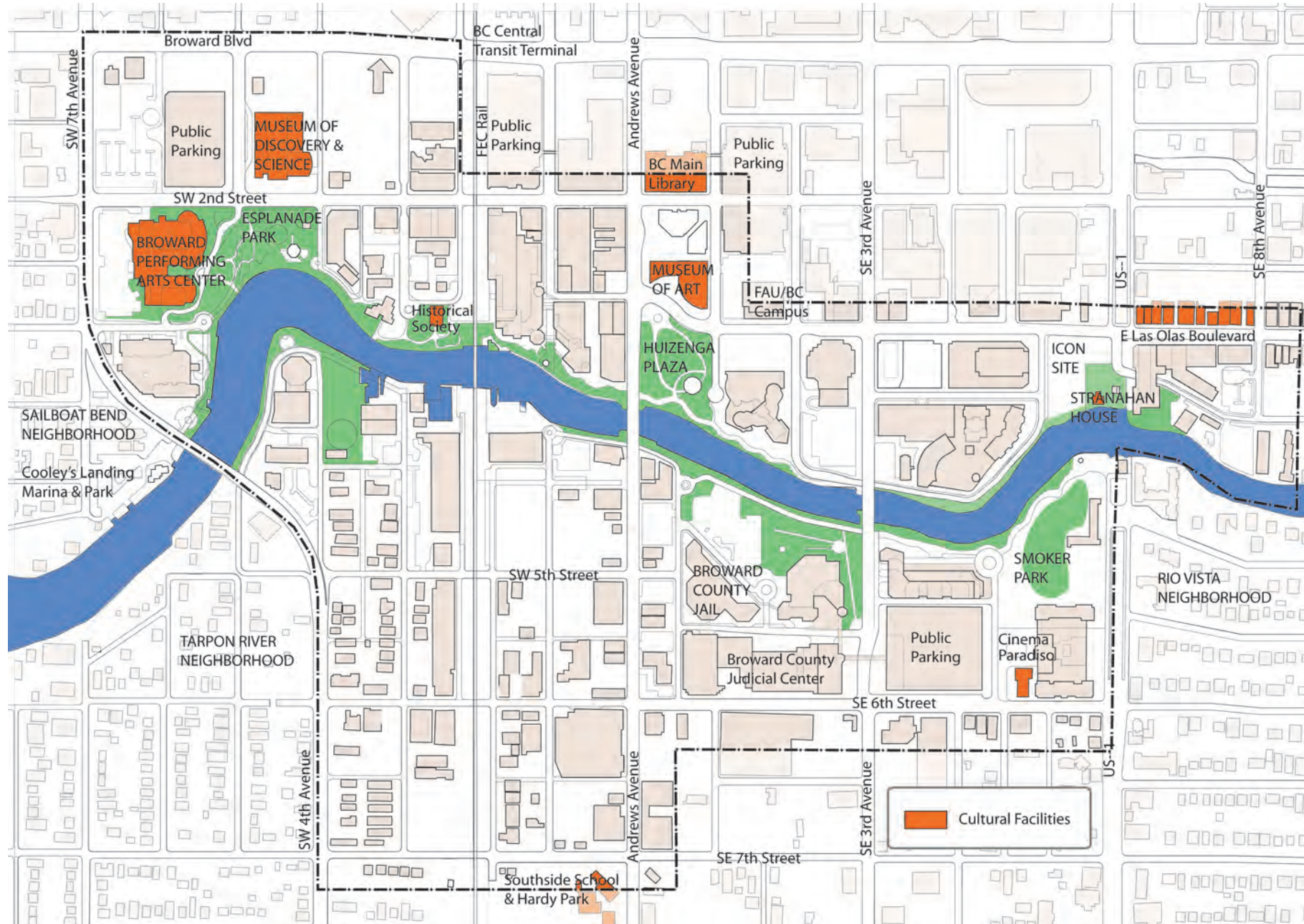
Despite these challenges, a great momentum exists to transform Fort Lauderdale’s recent individual success stories into a holistic vision for the entire central Downtown area. The City has adopted the 2008 New River Master Plan – a strategic long-term vision and framework for the future development of the north and south banks of the river – emphasizing the connection between active land uses, and the people they generate, with the Riverwalk and surrounding public realm generate. A restaurant, retail and entertainment market study has shown that enormous potential for consumer and tourism spending exists but is unmet or being lost to suburban areas. Key

stakeholders such as the Riverwalk Trust, the Broward Center for Performing Arts, and the Downtown Development Authority are actively imagining and implementing projects and initiatives to improve the district. A broad public consensus exists to make Downtown a more urban, livable, walkable, safe, diverse and active public environment and a significant regional destination.

The City has correctly observed that the next step in this process requires two key components: a compelling vision for an expanded Arts & Entertainment role in the Riverwalk district, and a public realm master plan for the Riverwalk park network that focuses on the activation of its public spaces and its linkage to the surrounding streets and neighborhoods. These two goals are complimentary and interdependent: a dispersed arts district, spanning from the Broward Center to the Museum of Art, will generate foot traffic to support dining, retail and services, as well as draw more people to the Riverwalk. Conversely, the arts as a driver of Downtown identity and development will be more likely to succeed because of the sense of place conveyed by the necklace of parks and plazas along the riverfront.

Our challenge is to utilize this plan to achieve multiple goals for Fort Lauderdale in the context of the economic downturn. First, it must position the Downtown to maximize its opportunities once the real estate market returns. Given the scale of development in the past ten years, a reduced number of sites remain available for future growth, and important choices must be made regarding density, land use and urban form for these sites. Second, given the economy, the plan must focus on actionable short-term, low-cost projects and initiatives that will continue to transform the Riverwalk District and broader Downtown areas even as large-scale development slows. This must not be a “plan on a shelf.”

# STUDY AREA



EXISTING

## STUDY BOUNDARIES

The study area is generally bounded by Broward Boulevard, SW 2nd Street and Las Olas Boulevard to the north; SE 8th Avenue and Federal Highway to the east; SE 6th and 7th Streets to the south; and SW 7th and 4th Avenues to the west.

The boundaries are consistent with the study area for the 2008 New River Master Plan, which created a framework for developing “character areas” in the Riverwalk District, and guiding physical improvements (mostly relating to private development), ultimately setting the stage for a more action-based strategy for the public realm.



## 10 PRINCIPLES:

- 1 Riverwalk District as Fort Lauderdale's 'Living Room'
- 2 A place for discovery, learning, and the arts
- 3 A year-round destination
- 4 Nature in the city
- 5 Re-connect the south side of the river

## RIVERWALK DISTRICT | Vision

Originally conceived in the Downtown New River Master Plan, the vision is for a Riverwalk District as the urban center of Broward County, providing a unique South Florida destination and a cosmopolitan experience for all to enjoy...





# RIVERWALK DISTRICT | Vision

The Vision is for a Riverwalk District where performances spill out of venues into waterfront parks; where walking to a gallery, a show, and dinner in one evening is a seamless, comfortable event...



The vision is for a Riverwalk District where the variety of venues, public art, and events creates the destination, attracting a diverse group of residents and tourists of all ages...



The vision is for a Riverwalk District where a large-scale new development might incorporate a black-box theater or art-cinema along with complementary retail uses; where strategically placed arts and entertainment venues relate to the network of open spaces, streets, and surrounding neighborhoods...



## 1 ACTIVATION STRATEGY: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 10 PRINCIPLES:

- 6 Coordinated management
- 7 Make it happen now!
- 8 Enhance economic value  
Downtown
- 9 Plant the seeds for a  
sustainable future
- 10 Celebrate the water



**MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW**

(see Chapter 4 for more detail)

**Objectives:**

To brand and operate the Riverwalk District as a unique South Florida destination, central to the image of a metropolitan Fort Lauderdale

To assure permanent activation by attracting the critical mass necessary to generate a more dynamic environment for economic development

To define and coordinate the activities and responsibilities required to develop and sustain the District

To create a vehicle for efficient and integrated stakeholder involvement

**Partners:**

City of Fort Lauderdale  
Riverwalk Trust  
Downtown Development Authority  
Broward Center for Performing Arts  
Riverwalk A&E District Consortium

**Responsibilities:**

Operations  
Real Estate  
Communications  
Programming Activity  
Marketing Activity  
Finance

**RIVERWALK DISTRICT** | Coordinated Events & Great Destinations

**Stranahan House, Laura Ward Plaza & Icon Site:**  
The Link to Las Olas

This complex of spaces links the Riverwalk to the vibrant retail and restaurant stretch of Las Olas that includes the Riverside Hotel. Laura Ward, Stranahan and the Icon Site in combination are a critical entry point to activities along both sides of the Riverwalk. Docking facilities at Laura Ward Plaza are essential for providing river crossing at this important gateway. Recommended uses and events include: Ferry Crossing, Fashion's Night Out, Lent Art, a Venue for Special Event Venue, Bike Rentals, Rest & Refreshments



**Smoker Park:**  
The Family Park

Like a traditional neighborhood park, Smoker becomes a dog run, a children's play area, an adult meditation area, picnic tables and attractive night time lighting. But Smoker Park is not just for the neighborhood. It hosts some unique celebrations and takes part in River wide events, anchoring the East End of the Riverwalk. Recommended uses and events include: Ferry Crossing, Holiday Festivals such as Smoker's Spooky Halloween Festival, Art in Smoker Park, Neighborhood Night Out, and Refreshments



**Court House:**  
The Market Square

The Court House Parking Lot on the south side of the Andrews Avenue Bridge becomes known as the location for a variety of markets in all seasons of the year. As the Andrews Bridge River Crossing area becomes developed, visitors to the market can combine the shopping experience with riverside dining and entertainment. Recommended uses and events include: Riverwalk Food Market, Antique and Holiday Markets



**Andrews Avenue Bridge:**  
The Activity Destination

Both sides of the River become active destinations with the addition of restaurants, cafes, and riverside events, making this section of the Riverwalk one of the most vibrant and active destinations for visitors from downtown and the region. The bridges that punctuate the Riverwalk are transformed into beacons of light, illuminating the entire area, drawing visitors to the riverbank from one side of the river to the other. Recommended uses and events include: Public Lighting Exhibitions, Waterfront and Semi-Enclosed Cafes, Mardi Gras Celebrations



**Huizenga Plaza:**  
The Festival Park

The largest open space along the Riverwalk has the most varied program of activities. The park is redesigned to accommodate a multiplicity of festivals, performances, sports related events, and recreational activities. Recommended uses and events include: Tournament Viewing, Multi-stage Festivals, Popular Music Concerts, Movie Nights, Art Events with MoA|Nova, Field Day, Skating Rink



**Las Olas Riverfront:**  
The Arts & Entertainment Destination

Programming reinforces the image of Riverfront as a retail entertainment district by revitalizing it with outdoor events, pop-up retail, and artist studios. Filling the existing unused spaces with life at all hours of the day and evening draws visitors from the surrounding streets toward the water. Recommended uses and events include: Dancing by the River, Outdoor Ballroom, Art Classes and Art Studios, Participatory Multi-media Events produced by Local Arts Organizations

# RIVERWALK DISTRICT | Coordinated Events & Great Destinations



**The Himmarshee Park:**  
Historic & Romantic

The charm of old Fort Lauderdale and the gardenlike setting of Himmarshee have made it a popular setting for weddings and special events. The general public would enjoy events that take advantage of its historic and romantic character, bridging the high-activity areas to the east and west. Recommended uses and events include: Lantern Festival, Walking Tours, Rest & Restaurants



**River Basin:**  
Riverwalk's Grand Arena

The Plaza overlooking the River Basin is an excellent location for viewing regattas, and performances in the expansive circle of open water. Looking up from the River Basin to the terraces of the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, the viewing area expands into a grand arena with the water itself as the River's main stage. Recommended uses and events include: Aerial Fireworks, Water Circus, Costumed Water Pageants, Ecology Tours, Fishing Classes, Kayaking



**River-wide Events & Installations**

Jazz Brunch has proven that animating several of the public spaces along Riverwalk simultaneously has the advantage of moving people along its length and attracting a critical mass. Although we recommend activities that reinforce the identity of each destination, we also recognize the value of staging major events that make an impact on the Riverwalk as a whole. Recommended uses and events include: Riverwalk Festival of Many Cultures, Light Up Lauderdale, Jazz Brunch, Riverstory – Audio/ Visual Self-Guided Tour



**Esplanade Park:**  
The Cultural Performance Stage

Located close to both the Broward Center for the Performing Arts and the Museum of Science and Discovery, Esplanade Park is in the perfect position to host a rich program of cultural offerings relating to the content of both organizations. Amenities such as restaurants, restrooms, and transportation are a crucial aspect of re-envisioning the park and making it a destination. Recommended events: Cultural Performances such as opera, modern dance, theater, comedy, classical and contemporary music, spoken word and performance art, and children's festivals coordinated with MODS



**The New River:**  
Riverwalk's Main Street

The New River itself connects the rich variety of destinations along it. Unlike some of the waterways in Fort Lauderdale, the New River belongs to the public sphere and should be seen as such. It will be seen increasingly as the Riverwalk's Main Street when it becomes more accessible to the general public through opportunities for river crossing, recreational boating, and special events. Recommended uses and events include: Barge Bands Floating along the River, Pleasure Boat Pageants, Dragon Boat Race, River Science Barge, Milk Carton Derby

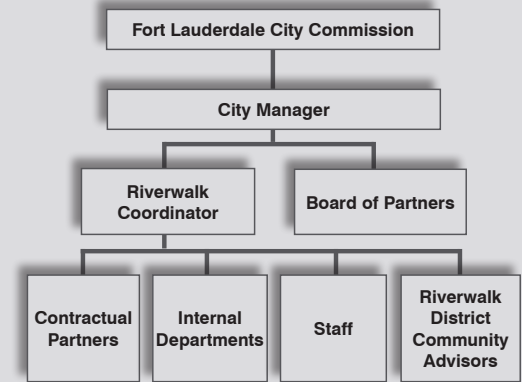


**View Corridors**

Drivers and pedestrians who do not know the location of the Riverwalk can easily miss it, so it is important to install beacons at the ends of the view corridors, whether they be in the form of lights, banners, or sculptures. These markers also serve to remind residents of this wonderful amenity or signal that an event is in progress. Recommended uses and events include: Public Art, Wayfinding Signage, Banners, Consistent Landscaping Treatment for Streets Leading to the River

## MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

(see Chapter 4 for more detail)



Fundamentally, the City should be in charge.

City would administer and manage contracts with outside agencies and partners to provide programs and services.

A Riverwalk Coordinator would report to the City Manager and facilitate and manage the delivery of City services to the Riverwalk.

In addition to the contractual relationships, there would be open and inclusive RFP's for food service, parking management, event ticketing, etc.

The Action Agenda begins to outline the potential next steps.