

# **POLLUTION PROBLEM AT THE MIAMI LITTLE RIVER PRESERVE SITE**

This site that has critical importance for quality of life and balanced development of a low-income urban area has been found to have a serious contamination problem. The site in Miami is on the verge of being acquired with funds from the Florida Communities Trust (FCT) and the Dade Safe Neighborhoods Bond Program. The plan is that this 2.3 acre property will become a park designed to enhance the natural beauty of the area, protect an important part of the South Florida ecosystem, and serve as a unifying and stabilizing landmark in an area of great diversity and rapid urban change. It is essential to clean up this site and not let it be lost to the public good.

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF CURRENT PLANS FOR THE SITE**

For years residents living adjacent to the site in Miami and El Portal have recognized and worked to find a way to preserve its beauty and key historical and environmental location on the Little River and potential as a community asset. During much of this time high crime rates and poverty in the area were factors in keeping the land from being developed and its valuation low. However these neighbors recognized that the site's dramatic vistas of river, open spaces, and native oaks, were such that it would eventually be developed, and very likely developed in a way that would be detrimental and divisive for the surrounding area.

In 1998 an Eastward Ho! planning charrette organized by El Portal, the Miami Shores Chamber of Commerce, and the South Florida and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Councils endorsed this vision for the site. Stating the need to "establish an oasis in the midst of urbanity", the charrette report noted how the Little River defines the character of the neighborhoods it flows through. It emphasized the importance of a nature park on the site to maintain this character and link the area to its historical and environmental significance.

Building on earlier work and the charrette, residents from the adjacent Oakland Grove Neighborhood Improvement Association and El Portal worked with the City of Miami to develop a land acquisition proposal to submit to Florida Communities Trust (FCT) Preservation 2000 program. The proposal was ranked 7th out of over 100 proposals and was the only one funded by the FCT that year in the Eastward Ho! corridor. Negotiations with the property owner took some time so it was not until December 2001 that the final steps leading to the City of Miami's purchase of the property were initiated. Before the purchase an environmental survey was, of course, required, and that was when the problem was discovered.

## **THE PROBLEM**

The contaminants found in the survey were arsenic, aldrin and dieldrin. The survey was done by ATC Associates, Inc. for the City of Miami. Eight-foot bores were made into the soil in eight locations as well as three shallow monitoring wells. Four of the bore samples were selected for testing (SB-1,2,3,4 on the map in the report). In one location (SB-1) arsenic and dieldrin were found at levels exceeding Miami-Dade County groundwater leachability criteria. Aldrin concentration at that location exceeded county residential soil exposure cleanup and was below the groundwater leachability criteria.

All four bore samples tested showed arsenic levels exceeding county residential soil exposure cleanup levels. One (discussed above) exceeded county groundwater leachability criteria; the other three did not. This is the most serious problem: Given that the four bore samples selected for testing were widely distributed the arsenic contamination is probably spread across the entire site. If this is the case the survey report says that the soil surface would have to be removed to the depth of the contamination. More detailed surveys would be required to determine the depth and extent of the arsenic contamination, but if it covered the entire site to a depth of three feet the report estimates an expenditure of over \$700,000 for excavation and removal of the 2.3 acre surface to this depth. The one location that had contamination above groundwater leachability criteria as well as aldrin and dieldrin was the site of a house with a basement that used to exist on the property. It is possible that pesticides were stored in the basement; that location will need further study.

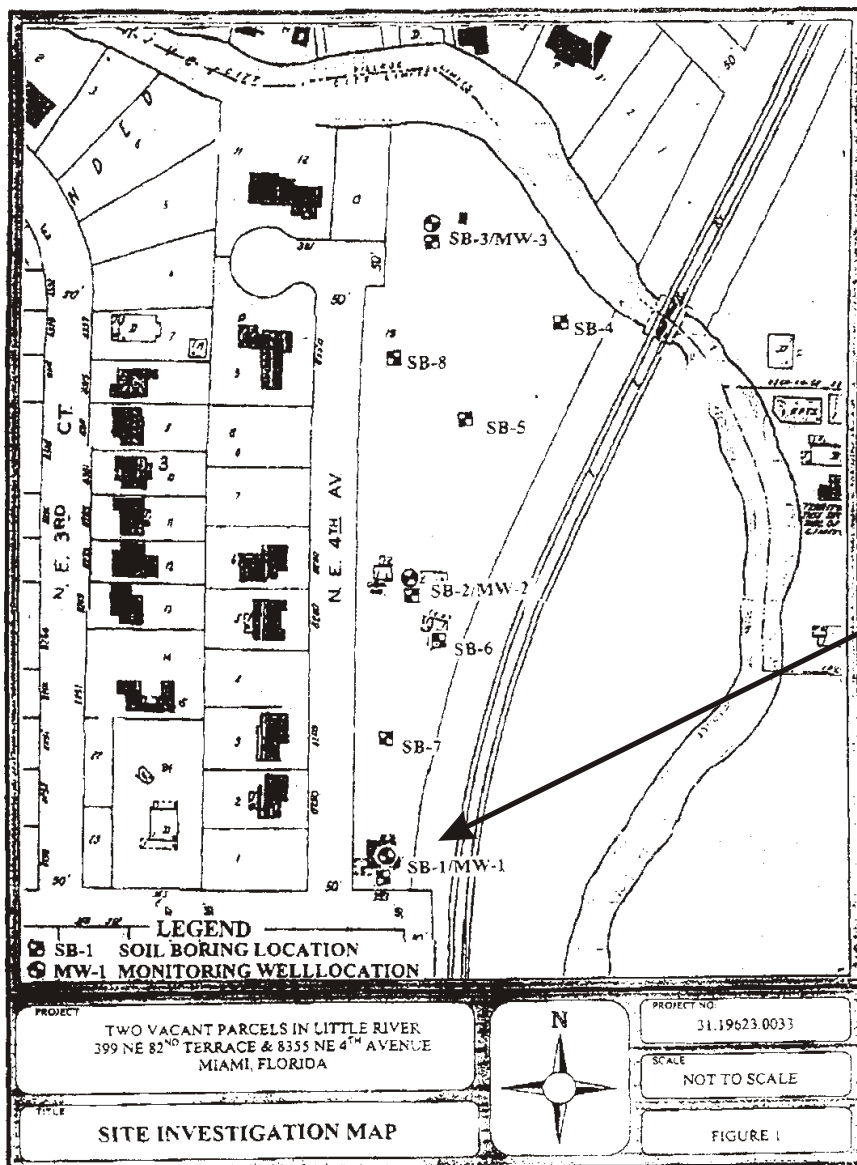
Ordinarily in circumstances such as this the current owner/seller of the property would be required to clean up the pollution. In this case that is not possible. The current owner is living in Australia and there is no feasible way to enforce him to do the cleanup, particularly given that the cleanup costs could far exceed the purchase value of the land.

## CONCLUSION

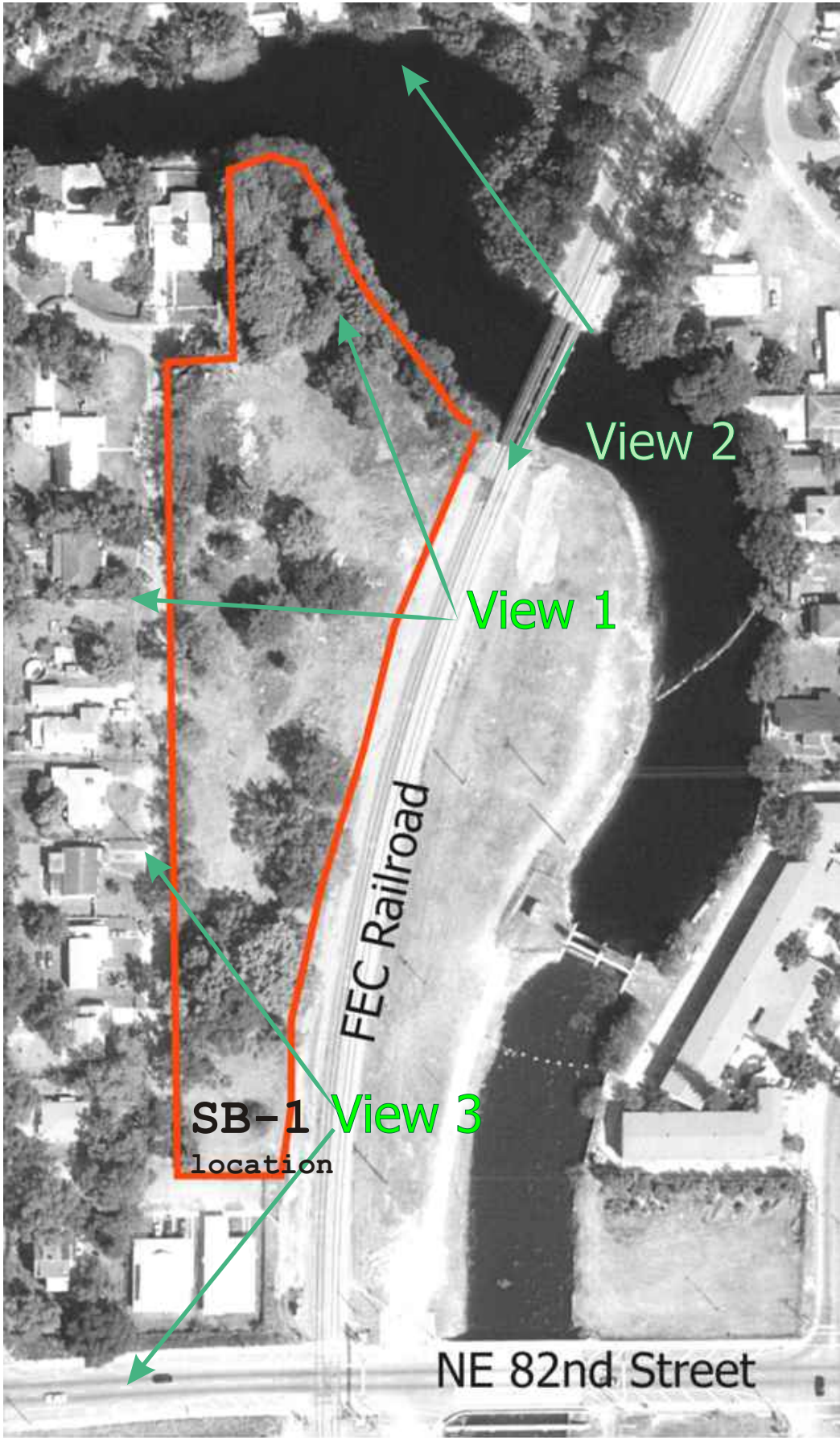
A cleanup that could amount to \$700,000 total may seem like a lot for Florida to commit to. That would be in addition to the \$150,000 amount of the FCT grant to purchase the property. However these figures need to be examined carefully and these questions answered: how does this cost compare with other environmental cleanups Florida is doing; why should not Florida support the FCT that rated an extremely low budget project so highly (most FCT projects involve millions of dollars of state money); how many other FCT projects will benefit so many residents of a diverse and mostly low-income urban area?

And even if the Little River Preserve Park is not funded, pollution effects on the property, adjacent waterway, and neighborhoods will still need to be assessed and remediated. Government will no doubt have to pay for it.

Map from ATC Associates report



SB-1: location where arsenic and dieldrin were found at levels exceeding Miami-Dade County groundwater leachability



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Little River Preserve Site



View 1 looking east from FEC tracks



View 2 - Little River at north end of site



View 3