

PEMBROKE PINES



PHOTOS BY CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

SIGN OF THE TIMES: A strip shopping center at Pines Boulevard and 62nd Avenue awaits tenants. Plans for redevelopment of the eastern part of the city haven't advanced.

Pines leaders say they have proposed several economic development programs to area businesses but none have succeeded.

BY DANIEL CHANG
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The divisions between eastern and western Pembroke Pines are most evident near opposite end of the city's main street, Pine Boulevard:

To the west, at the intersection with Interstate 75, the newly-built Shops at Pembroke Gardens bill itself as "a distinctive lifestyle center;" and the outdoor plaza's store and restaurants brim with people almost nightly.

EAST-WEST DIVIDE



POPULAR SPOT: Shoppers are shown at the massive new Pembroke Gardens development on Pines Boulevard just east of I-75.

In the city's east end, a few blocks from Florida's Turnpike, an old strip mall once home to the neighborhood diner and a dry cleaner advertises their now-vacant storefronts with a wooden post sign facing the street.

Elsewhere the disparity between the older east and the newer west is stark enough to give some residents an inferiority complex, said Vice Mayor Jack McCluskey, who has lived on the city's east side for 42 years.

"People see the development in the west and it looks good," he said, "and it's nice and green and the swales are wide on Pines Boulevard. ... The feeling a lot of people in the east have is we're second-class citizens. We're not as good looking."

It wasn't supposed to be that way after March 2005, when city voters approved a \$100 million bond referendum to repair and widen roads, build community

• TURN TO PINES, 5B

Progress slow to arrive in east Pembroke Pines

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...s, buy land for open and invest \$15 million economic development neighborhood revitalization for the city's older de.

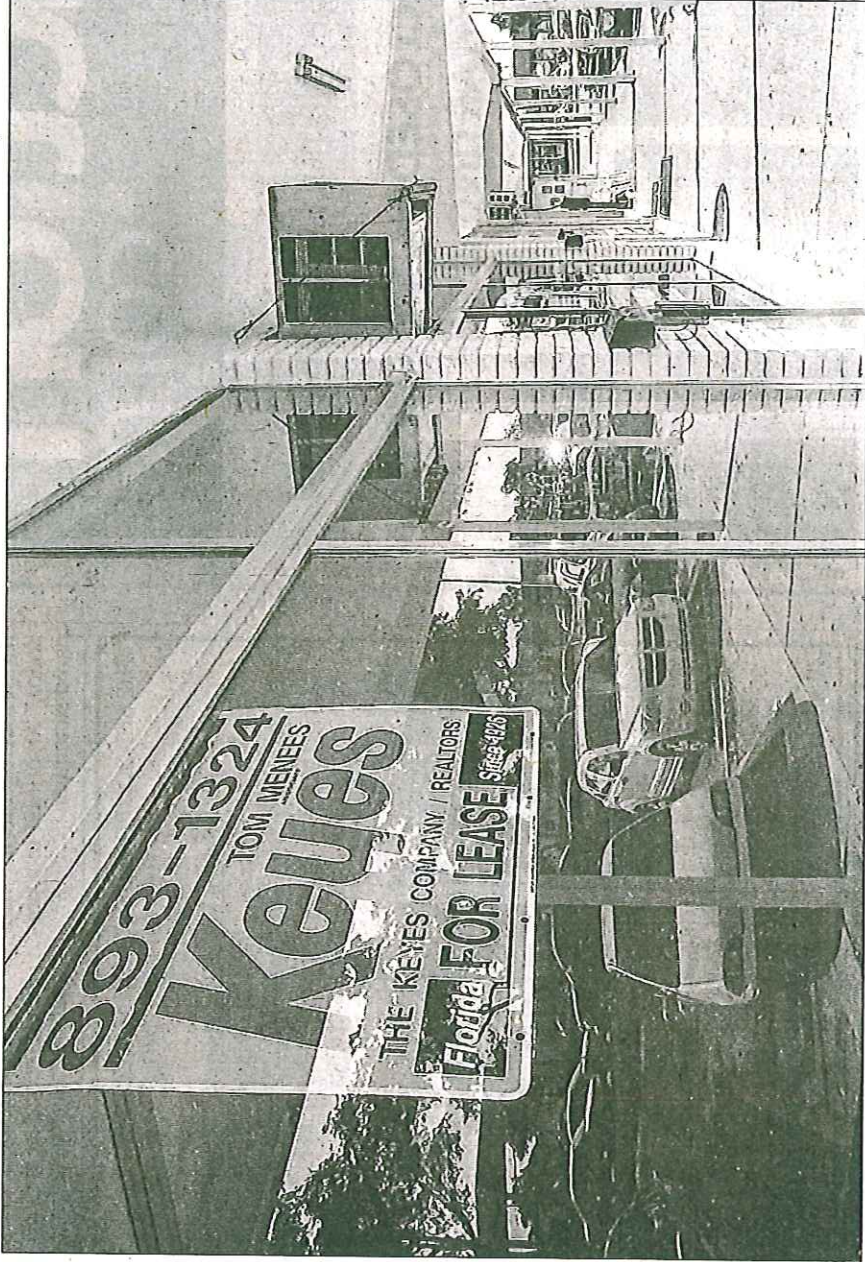
... six years later, officials have yet to spend a dollar on economic development in eastern Pembroke and instead have received the amount earmarked for improvements in the area.

... leaders say the slow pace of redevelopment for the area has not been for the best, that several officials have been pitched against owners but all have failed to succeed for lack of agreement or interest in businesses.

... Commissioner Carl Tokar, who represents the city's east side, said he has met numerous times with area business owners and officials to discuss economic development programs including tax incentives, interest-free loans, interest-free bonds and forgivable

...ve offered all three of the incentive programs," Tokar said, "and believe it or not, there hasn't been one program that's over a period of five years now." Tokar said the city is open to publicly funded development of privately owned property are limited to cooperative ventures, but he said, because the city does not own the properties, it would like to see incentives and because the city prohibits condemnation of properties for public use.

...nd of a Catch-22," Tokar said. "Unless we can get the property owners to agree to a program, economic development is a tough row to hoe in my area." Tokar said the city has developed in the decades since the 1990s land boom, but the southeastern-most part of the city, east of the airport, also got a boost from city officials and Broward College. The city



SPACE FOR RENT: There's plenty of room at this shopping center at Pembroke Road and 72nd Avenue.

CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Pines Boulevard and Pembroke Road, the area is home to the city's oldest neighborhoods and institutions, such as North Perry Airport and Broward College.

But businesses began to leave the area in the mid-1990s, following the westward march of development that began in the mid-1980s with the opening of Interstate 75 and intensified after 1992's Hurricane Andrew brought tens of thousands of new residents to western Pembroke Pines.

City officials responded in 1997 by designating Pines Boulevard and University Drive a revitalization zone, and allowing larger shopping centers to have bigger street signs promoting their tenants.

Neighboring residential areas, like Pines Village near the airport, also got a boost from city officials and Broward College. The city converted a former senior center on Pines Boulevard into a community recreation center with basketball courts and soccer and baseball fields. And the college unveiled a new auditorium and student center.

Still, vacant storefronts, aged buildings and worn signs persist to the east of the college and airport. "The eastern side of the city has been neglected," said Jay Schwartz, an east-side resident and chairman of the city's Economic Advisory Board.

In fact, money for economic development of the east side has been available since voters approved the \$100 million bond referendum March 2005. But in June 2007, the commission voted to eliminate 19 projects and reduce another four in order to scale back increased costs and to save on future debt payments.

City officials have held two public workshops and one town hall meeting since December 2008 to discuss east side redevelopment, and none has resulted in an effective plan.

McCluskey said he has tried to build consensus among his colleagues to approve a plan - including a pilot project to match private investment in the east side with low-interest and forgivable loans. But his efforts have failed.

"I'm one vote," said McCluskey, who urged his colleagues to support the loan program when it came before the commission for approval in February 2010.

executive of the Miramar Pembroke Pines Chamber of Commerce.

"You can walk in the same plaza from one end to the other and have 20 businesses there and get 20 different opinions about what needs to take place," Tokar said. "It just depends with the type of business in that plaza and what they're experiencing."

Though officials have yet to spend bond money on economic programs for the east side, they have begun to explore how to spend about \$1.5 million for streetscape - new sidewalks and curbs, streetlamps and markers all following a standard theme - expected to focus on Pines Boulevard from Florida's Turnpike west to Palm Avenue.

Shechter, the city commissioner, is pinning his hopes for an economic development plan on the street improvements, which will be funded with the bond monies approved in 2005.

"Hopefully when we get this streetscape thing under way," he said, "and Pines Boulevard looks that much better, perhaps that will be the impetus."

City Manager Charlie Dodge said commissioners will consider what to do about east side redevelopment at a public workshop scheduled for Wednesday, when Dodge will present a breakdown of the \$90 million in bond money and how it has been spent. Of those \$90 million, Dodge said, 92.34 percent or \$83,107,647 has been spent or allocated.

Given the broad definition of economic development as approved by voters in 2005, Dodge said commissioners have a lot of room to consider a plan - or even scrap the idea altogether.

"They could decide anything," Dodge said, "but I doubt seriously they're going to decide not to provide economic development where it's needed the most."

loans and other incentive programs.

"The city needs the courage to pull the trigger and make something happen," panelist Bill Kyriakakis, manager of Business Industrial Services of Broward County, told commissioners at the workshop. "Take a chance."

As of yet, though, city officials have yet to unveil an economic development program for the east side.

McCluskey said he is frustrated with the process.

"If you keep going in circles, you'll never get anywhere," he said. "And that's what we've done."

As city officials struggle to craft an effective program for the east side, the economic downturn has made it difficult for business owners to agree on an incentive program that would help them all equally, said Stella Tokar, president and chief