ELEMENT 3 – Urban Design Element

The purpose of the Urban Design Element is to develop an understanding of the overall physical form of the development within the University and its relationship to the surrounding community, and based on this understanding; provide conceptual principles for the organization of future development on the campus.

1. Inventory and Analysis of Existing Conditions

Founded in 1971 by John Seward Johnson I, Harbor Branch is located on a 600-acre campus along the Indian River Lagoon. Its staff includes over 200 scientists, engineers, mariners, and support personnel. The institute has a $40 million endowment and research grants totaling $15 million a year. Institution assets include a 204-foot research vessel, a pair of submersibles with the ability to reach more than half-mile under the ocean and a library of 47,000 sponges and microorganisms. Harbor Branch may be known best for its scientists’ discovery of the Challenger space shuttle rocket booster on the ocean floor the smoking gun that caused the 1986 explosion.- The Institution is “among three organizations in America”, and six in the world, that run manned deep-sea submersible research vehicles along the ocean floor. Harbor Branch merged into Florida Atlantic University in 2007.

The Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution consists of the following seven divisions:

- Aquaculture
- Biomedical Marine Research
- Engineering Research and Development
- Marine Operations
- Marine Science
- Marine Mammal Research
- Conservation

In 2004, following successive hurricanes and the loss of its annual funding from the family of the institution’s founder, Harbor Branch began looking for alternative options to continue its operations and reduce its debt. State and local officials stepped in to help when it was announced that an outside company was considering purchasing some of the HBOI’s riverfront property for development. Following negotiations, the institution decided to reject the developer's proposal in favor of a proposal to merge with Florida Atlantic University.

In November 2006, Florida Atlantic University opened an $11 million joint use marine science center on the campus of the HBOI. This 40,000-square-foot facility includes laboratories and supporting infrastructure to focus on marine science.

In December 2007, Harbor Branch merged with the university to become HBOI at FAU. During the 2007 legislative session, the State of Florida allocated $8.5 million in yearly recurring funds and $44.6 million in one-time construction costs in order to fund the acquisition. FAU was deeded 146 acres and the institution’s infrastructure, including its employees. All employees were guaranteed employment for one year. St. Lucie County and the State of Florida have also agreed to purchase the remainder of Harbor Branch's undeveloped property. This will enable the HBOI to further pay down its debt and ensure that its undeveloped land is preserved. A unique benefit of this merger is that as a part of Florida's University system Harbor Branch is eligible for a state match of all awards and grants received.
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The FAU facility today consists of approximately 146.55 acres of land obtained from the 500 acre parcel owned by the HBOI Foundation. The land consists of five parcels of land. The west parcel located between US Highway One and Old Dixie Highway consisting of approximately 42.44 acres, the east parcel of land around the existing channel consisting of approximately 74.01 acres, the far east parcel consisting of the small boat marina of approximately 6.66 acres, the south aquaculture parcel consisting of approximately 19.50 acres and the small aquaculture parcel to the northwest of aquaculture that consist of 3.94 acres.

1.a.1. Campus Open Spaces

The campus consists of significant open spaces that can be described as environmental habitat that should be preserved. These environmental areas range from wetlands to scrub oak habitat. The master plan is being developed to buffer and preserve the native habitat and restore areas that have been disturbed. Rare, threatened or endangered plant species shall be preserved and maintained using ecologically and economically sustainable practices that are in compliance with local, state, and federal ordinances, rules, regulations, and laws.

1.a.2. Campus Visual Structure

Generally the existing campus consists of eclectic buildings that were built or relocated to the site over the last 35 years without a pattern or planning arrangement. The Marine Science Building built in 2006 on the west campus is the first new building on the site in a number of years. It is also removed from other buildings and has not pedestrian or vehicular connection with the internal campus.

1.b. Inventory of Service Areas

The main service areas on site are located at the High Bay Building and in the areas around the secure research ship. There is no central collection points or main loading dock areas on the campus.

1.c. Existing Functional Linkages

There are no existing pedestrian linkages on site or to the site from either US Highway One or Old Dixie Highway. On the east campus the only connections are by the two lane surface road and due to the distance between buildings, the major mode of transportation is the automobile.

1.d. High Activity Buildings

The highest activity building on campus (east campus) is the Link Building. The building contains the administrative offices for the campus, purchasing and the only food service on campus. The Johnson Education Center also has conference and auditorium space.

The bulk of activity is in the research areas and occurs between 8am to 5pm. The Johnson Education Center is used for seminars and larger gatherings and is used in the evenings.

The St Lucie School District operates their MOA program which will be moving from the east campus to the west campus in the summer of 2009 and will have increased enrollment to 400 students.
1.e. Character of Existing Buildings and Open Spaces Within the Context Area

The area surrounding the campus is largely undeveloped with the exception of the area along US Highway One which has some low intensity commercial establishments. There is some residential areas to the south and to the west. Across the river on the barrier island is a state park.

Future Needs/Requirements

2.a. Analysis of the Evolution of the Development Pattern of the University Buildings and Open Spaces.

The development pattern for the campus will center around the channel and will develop from the west end between the Link Building and the Johnson Education Center and will develop to the east along the north and south side of the channel.

Access to the east campus will be maintained at the existing FEC railroad crossing along Old Dixie Highway and the existing roadway locations will be maintained.

2.b. Identification and Assessment of Spatial Configurations for Future Campus Development

The existing campus has no organization of buildings or spaces between the buildings. The haphazard arrangement of buildings will make it challenging in developing a cohesive University atmosphere. The development of a sense of arrival will be crucial in establishing the unified campus atmosphere. The channel will be the organizer of the spaces and allow for a linear growth pattern in two directions.

2.c. Identification and Assessment of Future Activity Location and Linkage Concepts

The objectives of the plan are to create a pedestrian ‘village’ with a series of nodes based on the quarter mile planning concept. Each node will act as an organizer and help develop courtyards and outdoor collaborative spaces. The nodes will also help to add density and intensity in key areas allowing for an orderly approach to developing and expanding utilities and infrastructure including a central plant.

Pedestrian linkages to the west campus and the housing area should occur early in the plan to encourage safe pedestrian and bicycle transportation to and from the east and west campus.