

2.0 COMMUNITY PROFILE

This section describes the geography, population, infrastructure, property and development trends, economic resources, environmental resources, historic and cultural resources, and critical facilities within St. Lucie County and the municipalities therein. The three main sources of information for this section are the 2000 U.S. Census, Enterprise Florida (2003), and The 2001 Florida Statistical Abstract (University of Florida, 2001a).

2.1 GEOGRAPHY

St. Lucie County is located along Florida's southeast coast, in the upper reaches of the South Florida geographic region. Locally, this area is referred to as Florida's Treasure Coast because of the many Spanish treasure galleons shipwrecked along this part of the coast. The County comprises approximately 600 square miles, of which 513 square miles are unincorporated. The balance of the land area is located within the incorporated municipalities of Fort Pierce, Port St. Lucie, and St. Lucie Village.

St. Lucie County may be characterized as slightly rectangular in shape. At its widest points, the County measures 24 miles north/south and 29 miles east/west. The County is divided into three physiographic regions, the Atlantic Coastal Ridge (including the barrier islands), the Eastern Valley, and the Osceola Plain. The dominating physiographic region of the east/central portion of the County is known as the Eastern Valley. The Valley extends from the Atlantic Coastal Ridge to the central part of the County. Elevations in this area range from +15 to +30 feet above sea level.

St. Lucie County averages 53 inches of precipitation annually as well as an average of 127 days of rain per year. The average high temperature in January is 73 degrees, while the low is 53 degrees. In July, the average high temperature is 90 degrees, while the average low is 73 degrees.

The vast citrus and ranching areas of central and western St. Lucie County are contained within the physiographic areas known as the Sebastian/St. Lucie Flats, Allapattah Flats, and the Osceola Flats. Except where drained for agricultural activities, these areas are characteristically pocketed with surface wetlands and have limited natural drainage. Elevations in this area are in the range of +30 to +60 feet, with the general fall of the land being from the northwest to the southeast.

The Atlantic Coastal Ridge forms the eastern border of the County and includes the coastal barrier island Hutchinson Island. Elevations range from sea level to about +15/+17 feet on the barrier island to as much as +60 feet along the western shorelines of the Indian River Lagoon. The western terminus of the Atlantic Coastal Ridge lies along the shoreline of the Indian River south of Fort Pierce and along the U.S. Highway 1 right-of-way (eastern side) north of Fort Pierce.

The North Fork of the St. Lucie River is the single principal freshwater estuary in St. Lucie County. Secondary watercourses include the North Fork's two primary tributaries, Five Mile and Ten Mile Creeks. An unconnected freshwater marsh network, known as the Savannas, is located immediately to the west of the Atlantic Coastal Ridge. The Savannas represent a vanishing natural feature that was once found along the entire length of the Indian River Lagoon, from Volusia County to northern Palm Beach County. Over time, the

spatial extent of the habitat has been lost due to the pressures of urban development. The key tracts of habitat that remain are situated in Port St. Lucie and northern St. Lucie County. Through the continued effort of the State of Florida's Conservation and Recreational Land (CARL) acquisition program, privately held properties within this area are being acquired for perpetual public preservation.

Lying between the western edges of the Atlantic Coastal Ridge and Hutchinson Island is Indian River Lagoon. This saltwater estuary is part of a larger ecosystem that extends 115 miles from Volusia County to northern Palm Beach County.

In addition to its inland estuary and isolated wetland network, St. Lucie County has 18 miles of Atlantic Ocean shoreline, much of which is currently undeveloped. Through the efforts of the citizens of St. Lucie County and the State of Florida, approximately 4.5 miles of this unincorporated oceanfront are under public ownership. Another 2 miles of oceanfront property are owned by the Florida Power & Light Company, and are to be maintained in their present natural state in conjunction with the operation of the St. Lucie Power Plant facilities. The balance of the remaining oceanfront properties is held in private ownership and available for development activities, which have historically been residential in character. Presently, approximately 40% of this privately held frontage is developed for residential or business purposes.

From a hazard perspective, especially in terms of flooding, drainage has had an important component shaping the overall development pattern. Many canals and drainage ditches have been constructed throughout St. Lucie County. The primary canals include

- C-23 – Providing drainage for 168 square miles in southern St. Lucie, northern Martin, and eastern Okeechobee counties. C-23 and its structures remove excess water from the C-23 Basin, supply water to the basin (and, occasionally, to the C-24 Basin), and maintain ground water elevations west of S-48 to prevent saltwater intrusion into the local ground water.
- C-24 – Providing drainage to 167 square miles in central St. Lucie and east central Okeechobee counties. C-24 and its control structures remove excess water from the C-24 Basin, supply water to the basin, and maintain ground water table elevation west of S-49 adequate to prevent saltwater intrusion into the local ground water.
- C-25 – Providing drainage to 165 square miles in northwest St. Lucie and eastern Okeechobee counties. C-25 and its control structures remove excess water from the C-25 Basin, supply water to the basin (and occasionally, to the C-24 Basin), and maintain ground water table elevation west of S-50 adequate to prevent saltwater intrusion into the local ground water.

2.2 POPULATION

In 2000, the estimated countywide population was 192,695, up 28% from 1990 (**Table 2.1**). The Treasure Coast has experienced tremendous growth since the 1960's, and this trend is expected to continue. According to a FEMA Post-Disaster Recovery and Redevelopment Guide, St. Lucie County was ranked 13th of the Atlantic and Gulf Coast counties with the largest population growth rates between 1960 and 1990. The County's

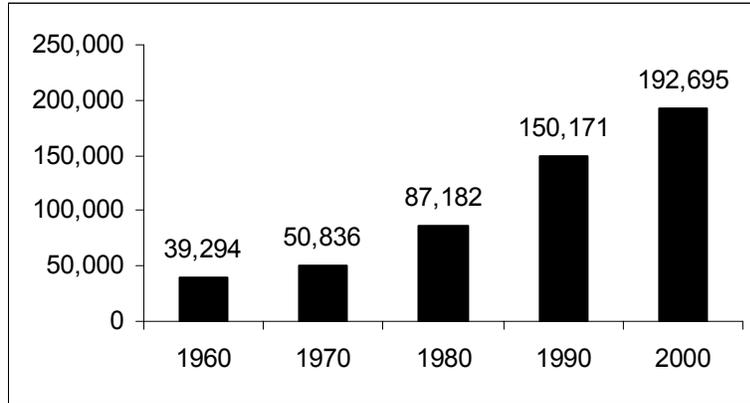
Table 2.1. Population growth in St. Lucie County.

| City/County | 1980 Census Data | 1990 Census Data | 2000 Census Data | % Increase (1980 - 1990) | % Increase (1990 - 2000) | 2010 (Projected) | % Increase (2000 - 2010) |
|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Fort Pierce | 33,802 | 36,830 | 37,516 | 9.0 | 1.9 | 55,500 | 47.9 |
| Port St. Lucie | 14,690 | 55,761 | 88,769 | 279.6 | 59.2 | 140,700 | 58.5 |
| Village of St. Lucie | 593 | 584 | 604 | (1.5) | 3.4 | 833 | 37.9 |
| Unincorporated | 38,097 | 56,996 | 65,806 | 49.6 | 15.5 | 93,067 | 45.2 |
| Countywide Totals | 87,182 | 150,171 | 192,695 | 72.3 | 28.3 | 290,100 | 50.5 |

Sources: South Florida Water Management District, 1998.
University of Florida, 1989, 1998, 2001b.

growth rate during this time period was 282.2%. **Figure 2.1** illustrates population growth in St. Lucie County between 1960 and 2000.

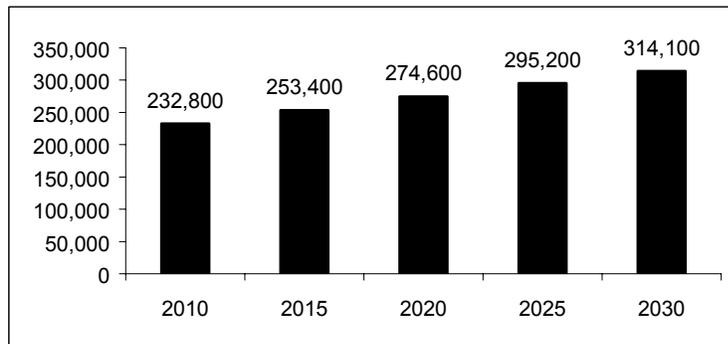
Figure 2.1. Population growth, St. Lucie County, 1960 – 2000.



Source: United States Census, 1990, 2000.

The majority of the growth is expected to occur in proximity to the City of Port St. Lucie, the fastest growing area in St. Lucie County. **Figure 2.2** illustrates the projected population according to the 2001 Florida Statistical Abstract for St. Lucie County between 2010 and 2030.

Figure 2.2. Projected population, St. Lucie County, 2010 – 2030.



Source: University of Florida, 2001a.

There are three municipalities in the County: Fort Pierce, Port St. Lucie, and St. Lucie Village. In terms of population, there is significant variation among them. The 2000 estimate of population for Port St. Lucie is 88,769. Fort Pierce is estimated to have a population of 37,516 and the Village, 604 people. Since 1980, there has been a dramatic shift of population toward south St. Lucie County. From 1980 to 1998, countywide population more than doubled; however, during that same period, the population of Port St. Lucie increased from 14,690 to 88,769, an increase of a little more than 500% or five times the 1980 population base. This growth pattern is expected to continue into the future.

Other significant population characteristics include age, race, income, and special needs. The median age of St. Lucie County residents is 42. Twenty-three percent of the County is over the age of 65. This is significant because elderly populations may require additional or special assistance during a natural hazard event. Because cultural differences can influence an individual's response to an event, it is important to define the County population in terms of race. Eight percent of St. Lucie County's residents are Hispanic or Latino, while 15% are Black or African American. While the entire County population grew nearly 28% between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population grew by over 800%. Nearly 14% of residents speak a language other than English at home. Language is an important consideration when developing preparedness materials for residents. The median household income in St. Lucie County is \$36,363, and 9.6% of families are considered to live below the poverty level. Per capita personal income in St. Lucie is approximately 26% lower than the state average.

2.3 INFRASTRUCTURE

2.3.1 Public Buildings

Central Services at the County is responsible for 1.4 million square feet of building space. There are a total of 12 fire stations in the County as well as a total of 31 public schools. In addition, the County library system is made up of seven branches. Altogether the County is responsible for 350 miles of paved roadways, 134 miles of rock/dirt roads, and 31 miles of asphalt roads.

2.3.2 Transportation

St. Lucie County is a multi-modal hub as exhibited by the various modes of transportation that exist within the County. Being an urbanizing County, residents and businesses are serviced by many suppliers that depend upon the air, rail, and trucking industries to distribute goods throughout southeast Florida. There are two major traffic corridors (i.e., Interstate 95 and the Florida Turnpike), the Florida East Coast Railroad and CSX, Port of Fort Pierce, and St. Lucie International Airport. The St. Lucie International Airport was the 12th busiest airport in the state in 2002. The Port of Fort Pierce is 28 feet deep, consists of 87 acres, 3 docks, warehouses, and dry and refrigerated storage. Major State Roads in St. Lucie County include SR 68, 70, 605, 611, 615, 707, 712, 713, 716, and 778. The County has a fixed route transit system to serve the transportation needs of County residents. If lessons are to be learned from more highly urbanized areas to the south (Fort Lauderdale and Miami), increased traffic congestion creates a greater potential for transportation accidents if no steps are taken to mitigate against such occurrences.

2.3.3 Utilities

Florida Power & Light Company and the FPUA provide electric service in the County. The FPUA, the City of Port St. Lucie, the City of Fort Pierce, St. Lucie West Utilities, and St. Lucie County Utilities provide water and sewer services in the County. FPUA, NUI/City Gas Company of Florida, and the City Gas Company of Florida provide gas service to County residents. There are three utility districts in the County: HEW/Lakewood Park, North County Holiday Pines, and North Hutchinson Island. Telephone companies that provide service in the County include AT&T, BellSouth, Sprint, and MCI.

2.4 PROPERTY AND DEVELOPMENT

As growth has occurred, the County has become more urbanized, especially east of the Interstate 95 corridor. Land in St. Lucie County is used for three major purposes: urban uses, agriculture, and protecting environmentally sensitive resource areas (e.g., water conservation areas, Savannas State Reserve Area, beach areas). There has been some conversion of rural, agricultural areas into residential communities and industrial and business employment centers. However, the major change has occurred in Port St. Lucie. The City is the result of a massive land sale project created by General Development Corporation (GDC) during the 1960's. However, it was not until the late 1970's that development began to dramatically increase. According to Enterprise Florida (2003), there are 9,809 acres of land zoned industrial in the County, with 1,300 acres of industrial parks designated as well.

Table 2.2 provides a synopsis of the community characteristics for each municipality.

Table 2.2. Community characteristics within St. Lucie County.

| City | Location | Urban/Rural | Community Character (Residential/Working/ Retirement) | Economic Base (Industrial/Agricultural/ Retirement/Business) |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------|---|--|
| St. Lucie Village | Coastal | Semi-Urban | Residential/Retirement | Residential/Retirement |
| Fort Pierce | Coastal | Urban | Residential/Working | Residential/Industrial/ Business |
| Port St. Lucie | Inland | Urban | Residential/Working/ Retirement | Residential/Business |
| Unincorporated St. Lucie County | Coastal/Inland | Urban/Rural | Residential/Working/ Retirement | Industrial/Agricultural/ Business |

Source: Continental Shelf Associates, Inc., 1999.

St. Lucie County has a total of 91,262 housing units comprised mostly of single-family detached units (62.9%) and mobile homes (12.9%). Seventy-two percent of homes in St. Lucie County were built prior to 1990. Nearly 80% of residents own their own home in St. Lucie County, and the median value of owner-occupied homes in the County is \$86,100. According to the 2000 Census, there are approximately 336.6 people per square mile.

Table 2.3 displays United States Department of Housing and Urban Development data on building permits in St. Lucie County.

Table 2.3. Building permits, St. Lucie County, 1980 – 2000.

| Location | 1980 | | 1990 | | 2000 | |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | Single-Family | Multi-Family | Single-Family | Multi-Family | Single-Family | Multi-Family |
| Fort Pierce | 49 | 334 | 22 | 76 | 25 | 26 |
| Port St. Lucie | 1,521 | 38 | 1,802 | 150 | 1,236 | 292 |
| Unincorporated County | 392 | 713 | 432 | 93 | 458 | 56 |
| St. Lucie Village | 11 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 1,973 | 1,085 | 2,260 | 319 | 1,719 | 374 |

Source: United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2003.

According to University of Florida (2001a), St. Lucie County had 1,745 single-family housing starts (new construction) and 642 multi-family housing starts in the year 2000. In 2000, reported building permits and new housing units in the County and municipalities were valued at \$193,998,000.

The St. Lucie County Future Land Use Element established an Urban Service Boundary (**Figure 2.3**), which runs generally along the I-95/Turnpike corridor and limits the area for which the County will provide services. Development west of the Urban Service Boundary is limited to densities that range from 1 dwelling unit per acre to 0.20 dwelling units per acre (1 dwelling unit per 5 acres). Development in excess of these densities requires an amendment to the Future Land Use Map in the Land Use Element. Any approval of such an amendment must include findings that the developer will provide the necessary services at no cost to local government, and the conversion of agricultural land maintains the viability of agricultural uses on adjacent lands.

The major use of land within the unincorporated areas of the County is agriculture. Well over 60% of the County is presently used for the production of citrus, cash crops, or ranching activities. These agricultural activities account for St. Lucie County being ranked among the top citrus producers in the State of Florida, contributing substantially to the local and regional economy.

The largest urban use of land within the unincorporated area of the County is for detached, single family residential dwelling units. This use accounts for approximately 13,000 acres with an additional 14,900 acres vacant and available for this use. Multi-family and mobile home development activity account for about 4,000 acres of the remaining developed portions of the County. About 600 additional acres are available for these uses.

Existing commercial and industrial activities account for approximately 5,100 acres. An additional 1,850 acres are available for commercial uses. About 850 acres are available for industrial uses. The remaining urban portions of the County are comprised of public service/recreation and transportation/utility activities.

The City of Fort Pierce is the oldest incorporated municipal body in St. Lucie County. Fort Pierce serves as the County Seat and has historically been the center for both commercial and industrial activity for the entire County. The City of Fort Pierce is consistent

Insert Figure 2.3

with small Florida coastal cities developed around the turn of the century. There is a small but well defined Central Business District (CBD), along with a number of residential neighborhoods. Typical of many established urban communities, the Fort Pierce CBD is being transformed from a retail-oriented business center into a more specialized business/office/service/tourist center. Retail activity is generally located in the “suburban” fringe areas of the City. The City of Fort Pierce is essentially built out. Future growth of the City will depend on the redevelopment and conversion of lower intensity uses to higher intensity uses or the annexation of additional property.

The City of Port St. Lucie and St. Lucie Village are dominated by residential use. Non-residential development activity within these communities is limited to essentially strip commercial development along the U.S. Highway 1 corridor and isolated neighborhood development throughout the City of Port St. Lucie. On the whole, when compared to the County’s Future Land Use Plan, there does not appear to be any points of significant land use conflict with the adjacent municipalities of Port St. Lucie or St. Lucie Village. Land use distributions within the City of Fort Pierce are typical of most Florida cities its size and development age. For many years, the U.S. Highway 1 corridor has served as the commercial core of the community. This land use pattern has carried over into the unincorporated areas of the County and is indicated on the Future Land Use Maps. Development to the west has typically been residential with the exception of an emergency commercial area along Okeechobee Road and as far west as the Turnpike.

Port St. Lucie may best be described as a pre-platted, single family residential community. The City encompasses approximately 80 square miles, yet because of the large number of platted, individually owned, single family lots, there is very limited existing opportunity for medium/large scale multi-family, commercial, or industrial development within the City limits. The St. Lucie West Development of Regional Impact provides the City with an opportunity to allow centralized services to develop.

The City of Port St. Lucie is dominated by residential uses. Non-residential development activities within this City occur generally along the U.S. Highway 1 and Port St. Lucie Boulevard corridors, within the St. Lucie West Development of Regional Impact, and to a lesser degree in isolated neighborhood developments throughout the City.

Population projections for Port St. Lucie indicate a continued high rate of residential growth. As in the past, the majority of this growth will be detached, single family dwelling units, located on individual 10,000 – 12,000 square foot lots. This form of community development is typical of the land sales/development practices of Florida in the 1960’s and 1970’s. This pattern is extremely inefficient for the economical provision of municipal services.

St. Lucie Village is a small residential community located along the west banks of the Indian River, north of Fort Pierce. The Village was incorporated in 1960 and contains about 3 square miles. Until such time as the remaining undeveloped tracts within the Village are built upon, there is not expected to be any significant increase in the Village’s population. There are not significant areas of commercial or industrial development within the jurisdiction of St. Lucie Village. St. Lucie Village also is dominated by residential use but at a much smaller scale than Port St. Lucie. Non-residential development activity within the Village generally occurs only along the U.S. Highway 1 corridor.

The County's Future Land Use Element establishes a Future Land Use Map to guide future development. **Figure 2.4** illustrates the current adopted Future Land Use Map for St. Lucie County.

2.5 ECONOMIC RESOURCES

The Chambers of Commerce serves businesses in St. Lucie County from two locations - Port St. Lucie and Fort Pierce. In 1990, the top three occupations in St. Lucie County were sales; precision production, craft, and repair; and administrative support. In 2000, the top three occupations were sales and office, management/professional, and service jobs. In 1990, the top three industries in the County were retail trade, construction, and health provision. In 2000, the top three industries were education, health, and social services; retail trade; and construction. For comparison, the top three industries in the state of Florida in 2001 were "other services," "professional and business services," and "healthcare and social assistance."

According to Enterprise Florida (2003), the top three employers in the County are Lawnwood Regional Medical Center (1,400), Florida Power & Light Company (790), and QVC (700). Also, St. Lucie County is known as the Grapefruit Capital of the World. In 1999, the County ranked 11th of 67 counties in farm cash receipts totaling \$245,000,000. The County currently supports a job growth incentive program that allows the Commission to issue grants of \$1,000 to \$2,000 for each new job created in the County. There must be a minimum of five jobs created, each earning a minimum of \$10.88 per hour.

There is one Foreign Trade Zone in the County as well. A Foreign-Trade Zone is a specially designated area, in or adjacent to a U.S. Customs Port of Entry, that is considered to be outside the Customs Territory of the U.S. The following is a partial list of the many benefits that can be attained from using Foreign Trade Zones or Foreign Trade Subzones:

- No duty is ever paid on re-exported merchandise from a Foreign Trade Zone.
- If the merchandise is sold domestically, no duty is paid until it leaves the zone or zones.
- Generally, no duty is paid on waste or yield loss in a Foreign Trade Zone or Subzone.
- Duty on scrap is eliminated or reduced in a Foreign Trade Zone.
- Generally, if foreign merchandise is manufactured within a Foreign Trade Zone, into a product with a lower duty rate, then the lower duty rate applies on the foreign content when duty is paid.
- Merchandise in a Foreign Trade Zone may be stored, repackaged, manipulated, manufactured, destroyed, or otherwise altered or changed.

2.6 ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

St. Lucie County maintains approximately 38 parks totaling 1,450 acres, 19 beach access areas, 13 boat launches, 12 beach-front parks, 22 landscaped government sites, 23 ball fields, 3 stadiums, and several community centers (St. Lucie County Board of Commissioners, 2002). There are two State Parks located in St. Lucie County: Fort Pierce Inlet State Park and Savannas Preserve State Park. The Fort Pierce Inlet State Park offers 340 acres of land located on the southern tip of North Hutchinson Island including wide

Insert Figure 2.4

sandy beaches and 1,500 feet of frontage on the Fort Pierce Inlet. The Savannas Preserve State Park is the last remaining freshwater marsh with multi-use trails and wildlife viewing.

To date, St. Lucie County has acquired approximately 6,000 acres under the Environmentally Significant Lands Program (St. Lucie County Environmental Resources Division, 2003). The purpose of the program is to purchase land with the intent of preserving ecologically unique communities, to protect and restore ecosystems to their natural state both upland and wetland to preserve endangered and threatened species, to maintain natural flood protection thereby providing water quality while providing compatible public use. Areas currently protected under this program include: Ancient Oaks, Avalon Addition, Blind Creek, Bluefield Ranch, Indrio North Savannas, South Savanna Buffer Preserve, Kinds Island, North Fork of the St. Lucie River, Ocean Bay, Paleo Hammock, Spruce Bluff, Queen's Island, Pinelands, and Walton Scrub.

2.7 HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

According to the National Register of Historic Places, there are twelve designated places in St. Lucie County. In Fort Pierce, designated places include the Arcade Building, Casa Caprona, Cresthaven, the Old Fort Pierce City Hall, Fort Pierce Old Post Office, Fort Pierce Site, Jules Frere House, Zora Neale Hurston House, St. Lucie High School, and Immokolee. The Captain Hammond House in White City and the St. Lucie Village Historic District also are listed.

Cultural events and festivals in St. Lucie County include the Fort Pierce Friday Fest, the Rainbow Festival, Seafood and Fishing Frenzy, and St. Lucie Water Fest. The City of Fort Pierce currently participates in the Main Street program.

2.8 CRITICAL FACILITIES

Hospitals and medical facilities provide important services during disasters. The medical service facilities in St. Lucie County include Indian River Community Mental Health Center, Lawnwood Pavilion, Lawnwood Regional Medical Center, Savannas Hospital, and St. Lucie Medical Center. St. Lucie County has a total of 10 nursing homes with 1,032 beds and 45 assisted living facilities with 895 beds.

Lines of communication are critical in providing information to the public before, during and after a disaster. There are three AM and five FM radio stations broadcasting in St. Lucie County including WFLM FM 104.7, WIRA AM 1400, WJNX AM 1330, WOSN FM 97.1, WOVB FM 95.5, WPSL AM 1590, WQCS FM 88.3, and WZZR FM 93. There are seven local television stations including WAR (IND), WPBF (ABC), WPTV (NBC), WTVX (IND), WPEC (CBS), WFLX (FOX), and WXEL (PBS). Locally printed newspapers include the Main Street Times, Port St. Lucie News, the Tribune, the Treasure Coast Business Journal, and The Miami Herald.

Fire stations and FDOF facilities are critical in the event of having to battle wildland fire.

- Rhode Island Avenue;
- Seaway Drive;
- SW Prima Vista;
- Aviation Way;

- SE Port St. Lucie Boulevard;
- E. Midway Road;
- Fort Pierce Boulevard;
- South Ocean Drive;
- North Ocean Drive;
- SW Dalton Circle;
- Shinn Road;
- SE Village Green;
- SW Becker Road;
- NW California; and
- Avenue D.