

VIEWPOINT: “What’s in store for Eighth Street?”

By Steve Rieck

Steve Rieck is Executive Director of the Nassau County Economic Development Board.

For the past several months, a small group of citizens and professionals have been working with staff from the City of Fernandina Beach to come up with a set of policies and land use strategies that can encourage sustainable economic growth in key parts of the city. The working group has focused its initial efforts on the Eighth Street Corridor from the Shave Bridge to Centre Street. Because a good portion of the Eighth Street Corridor lies in unincorporated Nassau County, we have engaged the county’s growth management staff in the project as well.

As a part of its research, the working group posted a survey on the city’s website, seeking input on a variety of questions:

1. What one word would you use to describe 8th Street today?
2. What one word would you use to describe how 8th Street could look in the future?
3. What kinds of businesses do you patronize on 8th Street?
4. How often do you visit them?
5. Out of a set of 18 options, which six would you choose to bring the most effective change to 8th Street?
6. What suggestions would you have for the city and county governments to improve 8th Street?
7. Would you be willing to participate in a community visioning exercise to help decide what should happen on 8th Street?

We should note that this was not a scientific survey. It was simply meant to gain a general sense of how people felt about the Eighth Street Corridor. The survey was posted for about ninety days, and nearly 400 responses were recorded. Here’s what we learned from them:

1. The six most used words to describe 8th Street today were “depressing, busy, ugly, blighted, run-down, eyesore.”
2. The most common words used to describe how 8th Street could look were “vibrant, welcoming, inviting, attractive (beautiful), gateway.”
3. There were four categories of businesses that people mentioned most often as using on 8th Street—restaurants/fast food, auto repair, consignment shops, and retail/services.
4. Fewer than 11 percent of respondents indicated that they never shopped on 8th Street; more than 89 percent visited businesses “regularly” or “sometimes”.
5. More than half of survey respondents said they would like to see more landscaping (trees, shrubs, flower boxes, etc.); fewer big trucks; and a theme/vision to guide redevelopment of the 8th Street “Gateway”. Other top suggestions included enhanced lighting (like streetlamps downtown); revised sign policies (to improve how the business signs look); bike-friendly options (bike racks, marked routes, etc.); and a park or open space.
6. Respondents suggested a few themes for possible action by governments to improve 8th Street: enforce codes and penalize violators; provide tax incentives for property owners to improve properties; re-route trucks; encourage landscaping; and improve signage (way-finding, etc.).
7. About half of respondents said they’d be willing to participate in a community visioning exercise in the future.

The Eighth Street Corridor Working Group will continue its work through the end of this calendar year. The group meets on the third Tuesday of each month at City Hall. If you’d like more information about how you can get involved, please contact Adrienne Burke at (904) 310-3142 or e-mail aburke@fbfl.org. Visit www.fbfl.us/LDCED to view more information about the group.

###