



DEVELOPMENT NEWS

Eastpointe plans to reinvigorate Gratiot's urban corridor

METROMODE, 9/4/2008

When someone mentions [Eastpointe](#) most people don't think of a city comparable in size and appearance to Ferndale, Berkley or Royal Oak. But the residents of the old east side inner ring suburb want to change that perception, so people do think of those places in comparison to their home.

Local leaders in Eastpointe think its downtown area at the intersection of Gratiot and 9 Mile Road can serve as the gateway into Macomb County in the same way Ferndale's vibrant downtown does to Oakland County.

"It's trying to become less of a bedroom community and more of a place to go, a 24-7 entertainment place," says Scott Clein, project executive for the Gratiot Avenue Corridor Study, the program that looks to lay the ground work for the revival of Eastpointe's downtown.

Admittedly, Eastpointe has a lot of catching up to do, but has the bones to make that kind of run toward urban vibrancy. Its downtown was once a traditional thriving center in the first half of the 20th Century. It lost a good bit of that as urban renewal and parking demands turned it into more of a suburban, strip-mall-style business district over the last 50 years or so.

Eastpointe is also becoming a more diverse place but maintaining its family-friendly atmosphere. It sits at the beginning of the county's major spoke that leads to its only noteworthy downtown — Mt. Clemens.

To accomplish this city planners have been holding public meetings for much of this last year, attempting to figure out exactly what local residents want. The bottom-line is a more walkable, dense, vibrant downtown area filled with mixed-use buildings that puts people and businesses on equal playing fields as cars.

"There is a desire to move toward, or back, to the zero-lot-line urban feel," says Clein, who is also an associate with Rochester Hills-based [Giffels-Webster Engineers](#). "They want higher density along the Gratiot corridor. They want to go taller, say 4-5-6 stories to promote more density."

To do this they are concentrating on reworking Gratiot so it's not so car dominant. That means creating defined areas for on-road parking, pedestrians, bicycles and motorists. Think bump outs to protect cars parked along Gratiot, bike lanes and crosswalks so all travelers are put on equal footing.

After that the city wants to encourage more downtown-style businesses, such as boutiques, outdoor cafes and restaurants to make it more of a destination. Further on down the line there is talk of filling in gaps to create a street wall of buildings and adding in environmentally friendly features, like rain gardens to improve storm-water discharge.

That's much further down the road. But for now, Eastpointe residents are just starting to recapture their share of urban living along Gratiot.

Source: Scott Clein, project executive for the Gratiot Avenue Corridor Study

Writer: Jon Zemke