

# LOCAL NEWS

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3A

## Suburb's street design seeks a more urban feel

### Busy Gratiot-9 Mile area focus of efforts

#### EASTPOINTE

By KIM NORTH SHINE  
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The City of Eastpointe is entering the next phase of a plan to create a more traditional downtown in a part of the city now dominated by parking lots and strip malls.

The city's Downtown Development Authority has authorized Giffels-Webster Engineers to design the Gratiot Avenue Corridor Plan for the area of Gratiot and 9 Mile, one of Eastpointe's busiest

thoroughfares and the city's closest thing to a downtown.

Ideally, the plan will let Eastpointe repeat the success stories of cities such as Ferndale, which experienced a residential and commercial rebirth after completing a similar process.

"It might sound trite to say we want to be like Berkley, Ferndale, Royal Oak; but certainly there are aspects there," Scott Clein, a project executive with Giffels-Webster, said.

Eastpointe is counting on an infusion of urbanism to make the community thrive.

The idea is to remove the typical suburban separations of resi-

dential and commercial, and to mix them in a dense setting, often with taller buildings, that is more conducive to activities like walking and cycling.

It's the type of bustling setting that, according to studies by organizations such as the Brookings Institute and the Urban Land Institute, attracts young, professional families; young singles, and the creative class.

The DDA board began planning the downtown development, which will include a new City Hall, last year. The area expected to undergo the changes runs on both sides of Gratiot between Couzens and Evergreen roads with a focus on the 9 Mile-Gratiot intersection.

See EASTPOINTE. 4A



Detroit Free Press

4A MONDAY, SEPT. 8, 2008

LOCAL NEWS

## EASTPOINTE | Urban feel sought for 9 and Gratiot

From Page 3A

While an eight-lane road might appear to be a roadblock to creating a dense downtown, Clein said it actually is a "positive attribute."

"If you think about it, having a lot of traffic on a road, it's a good thing," Clein said. "If you think about Woodward Avenue in Detroit, it's the heart of Detroit."

Still, physically changing the wide swath of roadway is key to the redevelopment.

On Saturday, 9 Mile and Gratiot was busy as usual.

Shopper Janine Mabry of nearby Roseville said she already makes the area a regular destination.

"I love it as it is," Mabry, 46, said. "I suppose something like a sidewalk café would be nice, and if it weren't so busy with cars, I might walk around more, stroll, have an ice cream or something."

Mayor Suzanne Pixley said the downtown district plan goes hand in hand with several other improvement and revitalization projects around the city and also with an effort to improve 8 Mile Road.

"If 8 Mile comes along it will have very positive effects," Pixley said. "Then you have to improve the Gratiot corridor."

Within five years, she said, she'd like to see the area become a mixed-use neighborhood.

Clein said the next step in completing the plan is figuring out several issues, including:

- How special lanes and wider sidewalks would make the area more accommodating to pedestrians and bicyclists.

- How parking can be changed to eliminate parking lots.

- How businesses could be

moved to the roadside instead of being set back hundreds of feet from the main street.

He said minor changes will happen as early as next year, lane-striping, decorative plantings in the medians and new signage among them.

Larger scale projects, such as new parking and road reconstruction, which will require funding and Michigan Department of Transportation availability, will take longer.

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