



**AGENDA
PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD
WORKSHOP
APRIL 23, 2025
1:00 PM
CITY HALL COMMISSION CHAMBERS
204 ASH STREET
FERNANDINA BEACH, FL 32034**

- 1. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL / DETERMINATION OF QUORUM**
- 2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- 3. NEW BUSINESS**
 - 3.1 COMMERCIAL REDEVELOPMENT** - *The Planning Advisory Board, at their March 12, 2025, Regular Meeting, directed staff to set up a Workshop and elected to discuss this matter, being one of their discussion items from their priority list.*
- 4. PUBLIC COMMENT**
- 5. ADJOURNMENT**

All members of the public are invited to be present and be heard. Persons with disabilities requiring accommodations in order to participate in this program or activity should contact the City Clerk at (904) 310-3115 or TTY/TDD 711 (for the hearing or speech impaired). All interested parties may appear at said meeting and be heard as to the advisability of any action, which may be considered with respect to such matter. For information regarding this matter, please contact the Planning Department (904) 310-3135.

PLANNING ADVISORY BOARD AGENDA ITEM
City of Fernandina Beach



SUBJECT:

ITEM TYPE: Zoning Map Amendment < 10 Acres

REQUESTED ACTION:

SYNOPSIS:

CITY ATTORNEY COMMENTS:

Kelly Gibson, Planning and
Conservation Director

Katie Newton, Paralegal



Sylvie McCann,

Date: April
16, 2025

Submitted By: Administrative Coordinator

A few thoughts to spur our thinking about commercial re-development

Before our workshop, I thought it might help if we all had a framework for thinking about commercial re-development. I'm hoping this might keep us focused, allow us to constructively build on one another's ideas, and be inspired by others from around the country.

So, *for the sake of our conversation*, here are a few thoughts.

First, it seems that commercial re-development in small towns is typically aimed at revitalizing struggling areas for one (or more) of seven reasons.

1. Economic Revitalization

Typically, this is about three things:

Attracting new businesses: Cities hope to bring in retail, restaurants, and service businesses to stimulate local spending.

Some cities are looking to increase tax revenue: An expanded tax base, they reason, helps fund city services without having to raise taxes.

And they want to increase occupancy. By refreshing empty or blighted buildings and lots, cities strive to improve the business environment — and the look and feel of the city.

2. Enrich Community Character and Identity

This strikes me as being most pertinent to Fernandina Beach

Older cities like ours strive to preserve their historic architecture, often restoring and adapting older buildings to maintain the town's charm and history.

They, like us, are also compelled to promote a distinct sense of place,¹ often creating lively, walkable areas that reinforce the town's identity and strengthen community pride.

¹ "Place" encompasses more than just a physical location; it embodies the relationships, history, and communal interactions that give a location its unique character. A true sense of place arises from direct and tangible interactions with those around you in a shared space. This perspective underscores the importance of community engagement and rootedness in fostering meaningful connections within a locale. (Front Porch Republic)

3. Improving public spaces²

Cities plunge into commercial redevelopment because they want to be more inviting. Hence, they invest in sidewalks, streetlights, trees, signage, benches, and public art to create a welcoming atmosphere.

They also make commercial areas safer and more pleasant for walking and gathering.

4. Attracting Visitors and Tourism

Cities often make struggling areas attractive to tourists by leveraging local history, culture, food, and events.

They may create venues or public spaces for farmers markets, festivals, and other community events as well.

5. Supporting Local Entrepreneurs

Some towns and cities provide space for local businesses, start-ups, and makers³ who may be priced out of larger cities.

In those efforts, they sometimes offer support for local investment and business growth.

6. Encouraging Mixed-Use Development

It's not unusual for cities to combine housing with shops, offices, or creative spaces to keep the area.

They also encourage residential development in or near commercial areas to increase foot traffic.

7. Environmental and Infrastructure Upgrades

Commercial redevelopment is often used to encourage green building practices and energy efficiency.

And, to upgrade water, sewer, broadband, and other infrastructure to support modern needs.

² "In most places throughout history, the public realm was where a [city] showed the rest of the world what it valued and what it was capable of. The public realm is where our citizenry would put its most gracious plaza and its most beautiful buildings. ... But the public realm in this country is, with few exceptions, rather unremarkable and even depressing. And this somehow seems wrong to us." Eric O. Jacobsen.

³ A maker is someone who creates, whether it's through physical construction, digital design, or even conceptualizing new ideas. Makers are creative problem-solvers and innovators who enjoy the process of bringing their ideas to life

Here a handful of examples I've found online:

Thomasville, Georgia

Population: ~18,000

Their story sounds a lot like ours.

It started with historic preservation; Thomasville revitalized its downtown by restoring historic buildings and reusing them for shops, galleries, and restaurants.



They also made public spaces more engaging through streetscaping,⁴ public art, and community gathering spaces. Overall, they created a walkable, delightful atmosphere.

Thomasville also provided local business support: By providing grants and mentorship, it helped local entrepreneurs fill storefronts instead of bringing in big-box stores.

The city effectively celebrated its one-of-a-kind identity and used preservation as an economic driver.

Silverton, Oregon

Population: ~10,000

Silverton focused on art and culture. The town invested in a series of murals (such as this one) and public art to establish a distinct look and personality.

Leaders then created a destination feel by hosting festivals, farmers markets, and the Oregon Garden nearby.

As incentives, Silverton offered façade improvement grants to small business owners.



This story's interesting in that the town created a strong visual identity and combined it with community events that bring people to the area.

⁴ Streetscape refers to the natural and built fabric of the street and is defined as the design quality of the street and its visual effect."

Paducah, Kentucky

Population: ~25,000

This story, too, is fascinating. Paducah's redevelopment of a worn-down area was depended on persuading artists to move into underused buildings.

The city created an arts and culture district that attracted tourists and sparked creative entrepreneurship.

To do this, Paducah formed public-private partnerships between government and non-profit groups.

It essentially employed “creative placemaking”⁵ as the engine for economic and social renewal.



Petaluma, California

Population: ~60,000

Petaluma converted former industrial areas into walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

To avoid sprawl, the city focused on infill. And to make the area more inviting, it emphasized aesthetics and pedestrian-oriented planning.



Petaluma, in its own words, employed “big city planning principles” to guide renewal.

To sum up:

⁵ A collaborative process where people come together to shape and improve public spaces, aiming to enhance the quality of life for residents and foster a stronger sense of community. It's not just about physical design, but also about considering the social, cultural, and economic aspects of a place.

Quick Summary

Town	Basic Strategy	Tactics	Results
Thomasville, GA	Historic preservation / walkability	Façade grants, local retail, charming streetscape	Heritage combined with beauty produced economic vitality
Silverton, OR	Art combined with investment in public spaces	Murals, events, tourism-based economy	A blend of culture with community produced renewal
Paducah, KY	Artists relocation plus mixed-use planning	Created live-work spaces and a distinct cultural district financed by public-private funding	Artists helped create and sustain revitalization
Petaluma, CA	Smart growth ⁶ combined with mixed-use planning	Infill development coupled with design standards, anti-sprawl approach	Good design produced sustainable growth

So, what are the prime opportunity areas for us:

Again, for the sake of conversation, let's say that the best way for us to take incremental steps toward commercial re-development is with three shopping centers:

Sadler Square (Lott's Furniture)

The north part of Amelia Island 8 Flags (Millenium)

Amelia Plaza (Winn-Dixie / Wal-Mart)

Transportation and traffic?

And perhaps, if a residential component is needed to make redevelopment work, could we include workforce housing and thereby reduce the number of cars coming over the bridge? We might then work with the transit authority or with employers to provide transportation to/from workplaces and maybe to/from grocery and drug stores which are close-by. Maybe explore ride share or vehicle share options?

We'd add more density, but in doing so we might decrease number of cars?

⁶ Smart Growth is a planning approach that prioritizes creating sustainable, economically prosperous, and socially equitable communities by focusing on efficient land use, transportation, and environmental preservation. It encourages compact, mixed-use development, walkability, and access to amenities, aiming to reduce urban sprawl and promote vibrant, livable neighborhoods.

Here are a few examples of renewed strip malls:

1. Bethesda Row – Bethesda, Maryland

Before: This consisted of aging, car-centric retail strips

After: Now, it's a high-end mixed-use development with walkable streets, local boutiques, restaurants, public art, and residences.

Tactics:



Streets were broken up into smaller pedestrian blocks. Active ground-floor uses and outdoor dining were featured. And in this case, integrated parking garages reduced surface lots.

This re-development transformed car space into people space, giving it more a main street feel.

2. Belmar – Lakewood, Colorado

Before: Belmar was a failed Villa Italia Mall

After: The space was redeveloped into a walkable “urban center” with shops, housing, offices, a plaza, and transit links.

Tactics:

Belmar created a mixed-use town center on a grid street system. The center included apartments above shops and the area created and now hosts public events in new civic spaces



The strip mall site was reimagined as a “downtown-like” district.

3. The Works – Atlanta, Georgia

Before: This was an old strip-industrial complex

After: The space was adapted for reuse and is now a mixed-use creative district with breweries, shops, food stalls, and maker spaces.

Tactics:



The Works maintained its “industrial charm” with exposed brick and steel. It focused on local food, makers, and culture. And it now includes a centralized event plaza and pop-up market spaces

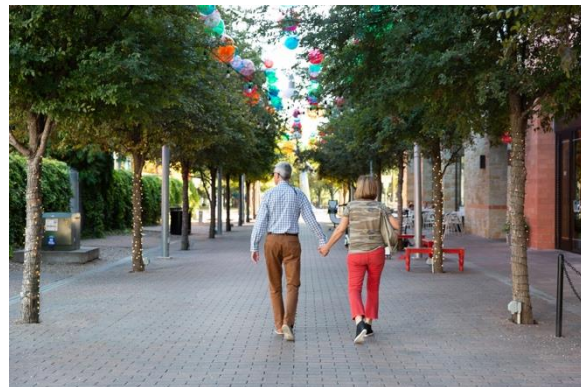
Here, the developers “leaned into authenticity,” re-using what was there without overly sanitizing it.

4. Mueller – Austin, Texas

Before: This part of Mueller was an abandoned airport surrounded by suburban strip development

After: It’s been recreated as a “new urbanist” mixed-use neighborhood with townhomes, retail clusters, offices, and parks.

Tactics:



Mueller created “dispersed urban villages” with walkable centers. These villages integrated parks and green infrastructure which replaced parking lots. And the area focused on local-serving retail, rather than big box stores

The idea was to introduce walkability and density into auto-dominated areas.

5. Plaza Fiesta – Atlanta, Georgia

Before: Plaza Fiesta was a traditional strip mall in decline

After: Today, it’s a vibrant Latino community market with small vendors, food stalls, entertainment, and community events.

Tactics:

The larger “mall” was subdivided into small shops; the new shopping area embraced the cultural identity of local residents. And thereby became a destination through food and events.

With Plaza Fiesta, developers combined identity and community to create cultural and economic vitality.

Moving Forward

So, *for the purpose of discussion*, maybe we say the priority of commercial redevelopment in Fernandina Beach is:

- To enrich the character and identity of Fernandina Beach
- In keeping with that character, to make the city’s public spaces more beautiful⁷.
- And that these efforts will initially be focused on the three strip malls mentioned above.

⁷ According to a recent study, what makes people happiest *isn't* wealth, family relationships, career, friends, health, freedom, and personal values (referred to as the Big 7). Instead, happiness is most easily attained by living in a beautiful city. Lovely architecture, history, green spaces, cobblestone streets — these had the greatest effect on happiness. The cumulative positive effects of daily beauty worked subtly but strongly.” The Atlantic

From: [Nick Gillette](#)
To: [Kelly Gibson](#)
Cc: [Margaret Pearson](#)
Subject: redevelopment criteria
Date: Monday, April 14, 2025 9:03:03 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender, were expecting this email, and know the content is safe.

Kelly/Margaret,

After consulting with as few others, I have compiled a few items to discuss at the Board level for commercial redevelopment criteria. These are what we are seeing and possible suggestions.

1. Impervious Area is too low for existing sites. When you consider the sites we all want redeveloped, they are usually mostly paved. It is hard to incentivize someone to redevelop a 90% impervious site and make them go down to 60%. Consider raising this (maybe not to what's existing, but something higher).
2. Many lots in our urban corridor are too small to have meaningful commercial development. Consider incentives to combine lots or to file commercial PUD's.
3. The CRA needs to be looked at in its entirety. The development standards obviously do not work since nothing is happening. Again, impervious area is too low as well as FAR.
4. For larger scale commercial (old shopping centers), the impervious areas stated before are very high in the existing condition. Consider an overlay for these sites. One idea – provide 8th street density (for mixed use only), pull building up to the road, park in the rear, go up to 45 feet, etc. The only way work live seems to work these days (from what I see) is for it to be larger scale and ground floor commercial with meaningful residential above it. As part of an overlay, architectural drawings can be required. Any developer who does this type of product will be happy to prepare these drawings because they will have an end game in mind.

These are the top 4 to me and a starting point where other things may come out after discussion.

I hope this helps.

Nick E. Gillette, P.E.
Gillette & Associates, Inc.
31 South 4th Street
Fernandina Beach, FL 32034

904-261-8819 – P

PAB LDC Elements of Revisions Under Consideration

Yellow and bolded text indicate what the focus of this meeting is.

Community Character

The distinct identity of a place. It is the collective impression a neighborhood or town makes on residents and visitors.

Natural Resources Protection/Conservation

The careful management and upkeep of natural resources like water, soil, forest, ocean, and wildlife to ensure their availability for current and future generations.

Sustainability

A development model that can meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own.

Revisions Under Consideration

Revision Name	PUD	1.03.04/1.03.05 clarity	Landscaping: Florida Friendly Clean-up Ordinance	Commercial Redevelopment	Parking Standards- Medical Offices and Beauty Salon Standards	Design Incentives	Impervious Surface Ratio	Density	Dark Skies	Dune Protection	Parking: General	Landscaping: General	Tree Protection	Examine Home Rule Options	Update Private Property Rights Element	Neighborhood Planning Strategies	Complete Streets Policy
Priority Level	High	High	High	High	High												
Status	Tabled indefinitely	Waiting on Board direction	Revisions to be discussed at May 2025 PAB meeting	To be discussed at 4/23/25 PAB worksession	To be place on the PAB agenda in June 2025 for affirmation of previous approval recommendation												
Date/Time Frame	Discussed at March meeting (3/12)	ASAP	To be place on the PAB agenda in June 11, 2025 for affirmation of previous approval recommendation	Year 2025	June meeting (6/11)												
Discussion Notes	Revision language drafted and previously recommended for approval by PAB	LDC section under legal review	Revision language drafted and perviously recommended for approval by PAB		Revision language drafted and perviously recommended for approval by PAB	Specific strategies/ incentives for design of spaces		No increase- consider reducing			Tied to Commercial Redevelopment				More robust with emphasis on neighbors	Define neighborhoods/ create maps	
Relevant Elements																	