

Giant surfboard, Ferris wheel could greet visitors to Cocoa Beach

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Jan. 29, 2014 |

floridatoday.com



Artist concept for beach gateway and boulevard on State Road 520 in Cocoa Beach with ferris wheel in Shepard Park.

Zoom

Artist concept for beach gateway and boulevard on State Road 520 in Cocoa Beach with ferris wheel in Shepard Park. / Source: Dover, Kohl & Partners

A giant replica of a surfboard, as tall as a cellphone tower, and a huge Ferris wheel may one day greet visitors to Cocoa Beach.

Trees would line State Road 520 to provide shade for wide sidewalks and curbside cafes.

The large, forlorn median west of Shepard Park could be landscaped, paved and lighted to host gatherings and events in a linear park.

Those are some of the ideas Cocoa Beach residents and businesses gave urban planners to develop the city's beach gateway. City leaders want a blueprint for a tourist destination that immediately grabs attention and lets visitors know they've arrived in Cocoa Beach, while also encouraging business investment.

"They want development, but they want it on the community's terms," said Victor Dover of Coral Gables-based Dover, Kohl & Partners. "They want to keep it Cocoa Beach, they want it to feel like the place they love where the traditions of the space age and surfing are respected."

Planners heard from about 100 people who participated during a week of meetings and workshops.

Some of the things they asked for included:

- Store fronts, doors and windows facing the street.
- Businesses sharing parking lots that are tucked away in convenient locations instead of large visible lots.
- Tree-lined streets.
- Wide sidewalks and fewer driveways.

"I'm so glad there was so wide of input from the community to capture all different ideas," said Dave Netterstrom, mayor of Cocoa Beach. "It's a pretty cool vision for Cocoa Beach. I'm excited for the opportunities it has to become something really special."

Bill Geiger, part-owner of a Cocoa Beach real estate appraisal company who serves on the city's board of adjustment, said he was impressed with the effort made to ask residents and business owners about what

they'd like to see.

"We have a lot of work to do still, this is a draft," Dover said. "It is very loose, we have the first drawings that are precise enough to kick the tires on these ideas."

The city hasn't budgeted what they'd be willing to spend for improvements, and costs were not discussed as part of the initial brainstorming process. Netterstrom expects the plan to attract business investment to pay for most of the development.

Now Cocoa Beach leaders will study the ideas and decide whether it's the right path, while planners examine how the changes could affect the city's traffic, economics and what rules would need to be altered.

The urban planners expect to return in a few weeks with a more refined presentation. Some of the proposals may require changing city codes and possibly even a voter referendum.

Planners suggested "tweaking" the city's building-height restrictions to discourage flat-top structures by allowing roof architecture above the 45-foot limit.

"That charter amendment was done to stop problematic things happening in your community," said consultant Bill Spikowski. "It probably makes sense for most of the city, but in this tourism area, we are suggesting a slight change."

Geiger welcomed the possibility of revisiting the height-restriction issue in Cocoa Beach as the city looks for redevelopment opportunities.

"It seems like everything that is going to allow us to grow and get better is going to include lightening some of the height issues," Geiger said.

Transforming the auxiliary roads alongside State Road 520 is an opportunity to attract new restaurants with curbside dining, said community advocate and former mayor Janice Scott. But she is concerned about the long-term impact that development will have on the community.

"I think it has a lot of potential," Scott said. "But we have to be careful so it is not a boom-and-bust thing."

Scott is worried that residents next to the proposed beach gateway development area could lose their privacy if multistory hotels and businesses are built alongside their single-family homes.

"You would have neighbors on your property line looking into your house and backyard pool," Scott said.

The large, empty median near Shepard Park is a gift from past generations, according to the planners who propose that it be turned into a linear park.

"You can only do that now because somebody so long ago said 'let's set aside enough land that we can do something really special here,'" Dover said.

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