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Panel: Put Amtrak station at Magnolia Ave.

By EILEEN ZAFFIRO, Staff writer 

DAYTONA BEACH -- The best spot for a new Amtrak passenger train station would be the area where Magnolia Avenue dead-ends just west of Ridgewood Avenue, according to a regional planning council that deals with transportation and land use issues.

A member of that council, Kim DeLaney, shared that opinion Wednesday night with a few dozen people gathered at City Hall to talk about where a station should be located if Amtrak is able to restart passenger service along Florida's east coast in a few years.

DeLaney, who's with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, said Amtrak and the Florida East Coast Railway also thought the Magnolia Avenue site would work "extremely well."

But the council's recommendation isn't binding. The decision will be made next week when city commissioners gather for their regular meeting.

The commission's choice for a station will go into an application being submitted for a \$210 million federal grant that would help make the new passenger line possible. The hope is the line will run from Jacksonville to Miami, with eight stops in between including Daytona Beach.

Service could start in the fall of 2013.

DeLaney said the other choice left for a station -- a spot just north of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune Boulevard beside the railroad tracks -- won't work. There isn't enough space for everything, she said.

"This would be a lot tighter location," she said, noting there would be no good place for buses moving through the area. "It's too much stuff to fit in this location."

Parking would have to be so far from the station that it would be "a non-starter" for Amtrak, she said. There are also concerns with industrial uses in the area and possible environmental concerns, she said.

"From a design perspective, the Magnolia site works well and the Mary McLeod Bethune site doesn't seem to work at all," she said.

One man at the meeting suggested moving the station a bit north, and another man there, Hemis Ivey, suggesting shifting it as far north as George Engram Boulevard.

"It would be a great economic development opportunity," said Ivey, a member of the city's Midtown Redevelopment Board. "If you're going to buy out property on Magnolia, you can do the same thing by Mary McLeod Bethune Boulevard. I don't want Midtown left out of the development."

Willie Crapps also prefers locating the station north of International Speedway Boulevard.

"The land is there. Everything you have south of International Speedway Boulevard is there" as well, Crapps said.

Pushing closer to George Engram Boulevard would bring the station too close to residential uses and too far from the Mary McLeod Bethune Boulevard business district and Bethune-Cookman University, DeLaney said.

"You're losing the things that make it a great location," she said.

The Magnolia Avenue site could have some challenges, too, though. A suggested design shown at Wednesday's meeting includes a road running in front of the station that doesn't exist.

The state Department of Transportation would have to acquire land from a private owner to create the road that would connect to International Speedway Boulevard. Segrave Street and Magnolia Avenue would be the other two roads used to get in and out of the site.

There had been an Amtrak station at the Magnolia site until the 1960s, when service was halted and the building was torn down.

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