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Cocoa picks Rosa L. Jones site for train depot

BY SUSANNE CERVENKA • FLORIDA TODAY • JUNE 23, 2010

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COCOA — City leaders said they had to weigh thoughts in their heads versus those in their hearts as they picked a site on Rosa Lee Jones Boulevard for a proposed Amtrak station.

The decision came after nearly three hours of discussion during which residents lobbied city leaders to select another site on Stone Street for the station.

“My heart tells me Stone Street, but my head tells me Rosa Lee Jones,” said Ed Lanni, a member of the Cocoa Redevelopment Agency. The agency took up the station decision Wednesday night in a joint meeting with Cocoa City Council.

The selection will be rolled into a federal stimulus application due in July that Florida Department of Transportation is preparing in an effort to return passenger train service to Florida’s East Coast. Service could begin in three years.

The site would be the largest of three Brevard County stations. Smaller stops are proposed for Historic Downtown Melbourne and Pine Street in Titusville.

Stone Street was once a hub of the city’s black community before businesses closed, depressing the area. Supporters said locating the Amtrak station there will help revitalize an area that had historically been neglected.

“This is an opportunity to help a disadvantaged community,” said the Rev. Oliver Wells, pastor of Greater St. Paul Baptist Church.

Stone Street has more opportunities in the immediate area for redevelopment, but other constraints made it a weaker site than the one on Rosa Lee Jones Boulevard, project planners said.

Both sites would see economic benefits because

they are so close to each other, said Kim Delaney with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, which has led the East Coast passenger train effort.

A Rosa Lee Jones Boulevard site would be easier to exit for buses carrying cruise passengers to Port Canaveral and was deemed better for pedestrians headed to Cocoa Village, she said.

Stone Street’s proximity to State Road 520 would likely force northbound trains to stop in the crossing, blocking traffic flow.

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Cocoa city leaders selected a site on Rosa Lee Jones Boulevard for a proposed Amtrak Stations.

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- Historic Downtown Melbourne
- Pine Street in Titusville.

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The Rosa Lee Jones site was a stop decades ago when the Florida East Coast Railway track last had passenger service, and the original station still exists. The 4,000-square foot building could be remodeled to house the 2,500-square-feet needed for a modern station, while still offering space for related business, Delaney said.

At \$5.67 million, the Rosa Lee Jones site is also cheaper to develop than Stone Street, with a price tag of \$6.81 million. Cocoa would have had to pay the extra cost of developing Stone Street, Cocoa community development director John Titkanich said.

There, however, Cocoa would have to lease the former train depot, where the city would own a Stone Street station.

Stone Street found support from Mayor Michael Blake and Councilman Clarence Whipple.

"It's a community that has been deprived for a number of years," Blake said. "I think this would be one of the ways to heal a disparity between the city of Cocoa and the citizens in that direct community."

Contact Cervenka at 242-3632 or scervenka@floridatoday.com.

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