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City commission picks San Marco site for proposed Amtrak station

By *St. Augustine Record*
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The St. Augustine City Commission on Monday picked a former Florida East Coast Railway station, between U.S. 1 and San Marco Avenue, for a proposed Amtrak station. The proposed passenger line could connect Jacksonville to Miami.

The Florida Department of Transportation is planning on asking for stimulus funds to build the \$268 million project.

The FEC used the 4,000-square-foot station before it stopped offering passenger service in the '60s, city staff have said.

The location wasn't the city's favorite; it wanted to erect a 1,200-square-foot building on the west side of U.S. 1 near the intersection with Carrera Street.

But the commission approved the San Marco site after finding that the Carrera site wouldn't be ready in time to qualify for stimulus funding.

"I'm very eager to support this," Commissioner Nancy Sikes-Kline said. "It will be a great investment for our community."

The site could offer retail opportunities because of its size, said Kim Delaney, growth management coordinator for the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council, which has taken the lead in advocating for this project.

Delaney said that, if the station is approved, the federal government will pay 80 percent of the cost and state and local governments must pay 20 percent.

But because the station is mostly intact, it would cost less to renovate than it would to build a new station.

If the project is approved, it would bring inter-state traffic to the city -- that is, tourists from within the state rather than commuters, Delaney said.

The application must be submitted by the first week in August, Delaney said.

St. Augustine is the seventh of eight cities who must choose station locations in order for the project to go forward.

The eighth, Melbourne, plans to vote on a station in July, Delaney has said.

The other cities on the proposed line are Titusville, Daytona Beach, Fort Pierce, Vero Beach, Cocoa and Stuart.

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