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Fourth, Eighth avenues can be models  
Our View

Even more than the three interstate highways that crisscross Nashville, the major state roads that flow into the city from all directions are life-giving arteries for this busy city.

Gallatin, Dickerson, Lebanon and Hillsboro roads and Charlotte Avenue are commercial and residential districts unto themselves, each with their own character. So, too, are Fourth and Eighth avenues south of downtown, which become Nolensville and Franklin pikes as they extend out from the city core.

So when it was announced last week that Metro will work with the Urban Land Institute on a yearlong study of how to redevelop the Fourth and Eighth corridors, funded by the institute, it might have been expected that the other parts of town might feel slighted.

North, East and West Nashville neighbors shouldn't feel left out, however. There are a couple of good reasons to begin there, and while some previous administrations have tended to favor certain parts of Nashville over others, that does not appear to be the case with Mayor Karl Dean's. His office has, for example, contributed sidewalks and bikeways throughout the city.

But one has to start somewhere. In choosing the south side, the mayor has a vital asset sitting at its center: the Tennessee State Fairgrounds. Such a large piece of real estate, already owned by the city, affords urban planners more leeway to innovate than they might in other parts of the city.

For example, the fairgrounds might be seen as a secondary hub for a new mass-transit system. Or planners might recommend zoning it for a type of business that would require a large work force and spin off smaller businesses.

At least one individual, Metro Councilman Jason Holleman, suggested to The Tennessean last week that the corridor study may be just a ploy to lure particular developers to the fairgrounds site. Time will tell, though it's unclear why the mayor's office would need to conceal its motive.

What is apparent is that Fourth and Eighth avenues south of downtown are ripe for redevelopment. A drive along either route reveals long sections where traffic is congested because of a lack of turn lanes and unsynchronized traffic signals; a clutter of styles of business signs; a lack of streetlights and incomplete stretches of sidewalks that hinder pedestrian traffic. Certain features such as the Radnor Yards form barriers that inhibit natural traffic flow and contribute to commercial dead zones.

The Urban Land Institute study can suggest uses for vacant and underdeveloped property in the area and point out ways to develop Fourth and Eighth to better absorb the population growth that Nashville expects over the next couple of decades. And it is hoped that the institute can offer guidance on the delicate issue of how to encourage a more diverse mix of businesses to the corridors.

By concentrating on one part of town first, Metro can better learn what works and what doesn't before they move on to Gallatin Road, Charlotte Avenue and other areas.

Ultimately, it takes time to bring change to a city such as Nashville, with its distinct, well-established neighborhoods. A thorough study of how to manage growth will balance vibrant growth and honored traditions in a city that values both.