

8 Mile businesses to get upkeep help

Money available for code, beauty fixes

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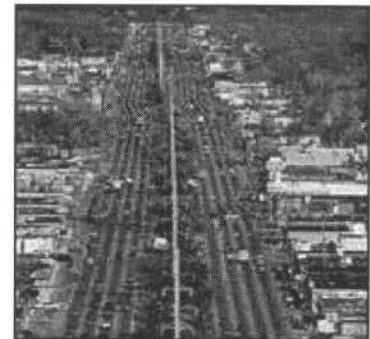
Eight Mile Road, the legendary divide between Detroit and the suburbs, is about to experience a face-lift of sorts.

For years, portions of the road have been considered an eyesore with overgrown grass on the outside of storefronts and litter on the ground. Now, however, businesses such as automotive suppliers, churches and restaurants along 8 Mile are getting a boost from the 8 Mile Boulevard Association's Corridor Keeper Program.

The association is made up of planners from various communities, including Oak Park, Royal Oak Township, Southfield, Farmington Hills, Eastpointe and Warren, who want to help beautify the area.

"We met with the planners of the communities that border 8 Mile Road, and we realized that there was a need for code enforcement and to assist business owners with exterior appearance," said boulevard association spokeswoman Tami Salisbury.

The program would employ a corridor keeper. That person would be the first contact for business owners before code enforcers inspect the businesses. "We want to resolve issues before" business owners "get fined, and we want to link people with resources to rectify problems," Salisbury said. "Most of our businesses are very small in nature."



The 8 Mile Boulevard Association program is an effort by planners in border communities. Oak Park is at left and Detroit at right in this view. (1998 photo by ANDREW JOHNSTON/Detroit Free Press)

And many of them are too financially strapped to fix the violations. Under the plan, the business owner would pay half and the association the other half. If a business owner cannot afford to pay his or her share to fix a code violation, the association would put the owner in contact with nonprofit organizations or grants that could help.

This would apply to other fixes as well. For example, the association plans to form a façade-enhancement program that would help businesses improve their appearances.

The association received help through a grant from Partnerships for Change, a program that offers grants to communities striving to cooperate in Michigan. But the boulevard association still needs funding for the corridor keeper position. Salisbury hopes a corridor keeper will be appointed by late 2006 or early 2007.

Jonathon D. Hallberg, executive director of the Cornerstone Development Authority in Southfield, said this is the right kind of step to take. "It's a great way to ensure all the properties look great, and the best aspect of it is that it adds a face to the association," the corridor keeper.

Hallberg is on the association's Planning Advisory Committee. "It's also a way to let businesses know about grants," he said. "We're just trying to build on the momentum that we're experiencing."

The program comes at an unusually good time for 8 Mile: \$250 million in developments are occurring on the road right now, Hallberg said. Those include a \$35,000 retail center being built at 8 Mile and Woodward and a \$50,000 center at 8 Mile and Greenfield.

For more on the association, go to www.eightmile.org.

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