

Florida BayTown Vernacular

Visitors to our Historic Downtown are typically charmed with the traditional main-street feel. They are also naturally enchanted with the Southern Hospitality that is so easily conveyed by our residents and from within our businesses. We have great businesses and great products. We just need more customers! One significant thing we can do to attract those who might otherwise “drive on by” is to enhance our image by focusing on our unique nature as a Florida bay community. Again, to quote small-town expert Robert Gibbs, “Port St. Joe is a potentially unique town that enjoys an historical and ‘old-time, main-street’ feel. This could be magnified with a consistent theme, rhyme and reason to the facades, types of business and signage.”

We have a wonderful foundation and are gearing up to make a few improvements to ensure our historic downtown will become irresistible. Any theme must certainly be built around the natural aspects, history and aspirations of the people. Throughout 2007, we set about finding out what our theme should be and how we would want to present our town to others.

We began to ask you through surveys and in meetings. Sometimes we know what we like; however, we may not know exactly how to describe it. That is why, over the course of the past year, we showed you images of buildings of various architectural styles and colors. We ranked your preferences and determined that, by in large, you were drawn to two general styles: Old Florida and Craftsman (or Arts & Crafts). For the downtown district, we’ve landed on an approach less residential and more descriptive of the best of what we actually have: “Florida BayTown.”

The Florida BayTown Vernacular is a unique style, developed within the Port St. Joe Historic District, evolving out of the Bay climate and nautical uses (and the architectural and technical responses to them) and the positive aspects of the legacy of a “cracker” culture of this area of the Southeast US. Dana Ste. Claire, in his book Cracker Culture in Florida History notes the architecture represents “self-sufficiency, self-reliance, a sometimes brutal honesty, and a penchant for a simple, direct approach to people and problems.” The styles, the colors, and the materials that provide our essential and respectful connection to the environment have been memorialized and carried forward to a more urban and commercial use in the downtown.

Important elements include shade (arcades, porches, trellises, deep canopies, etc.) and natural air flow to maximize outdoor comfort during the hot summer days. There should be many inviting spots for pedestrians to stop and rest in comfort, visit with one another, and have opportunity to be attracted to adjacent businesses.

The designs maximize an honest, straightforward and functional approach using indigenous materials and elements.

Exposed structural elements (beams, columns, supports) as a component of the visual composition are encouraged, provided that the structural elements left exposed are crafted in lieu of merely constructed, i.e. that connections are carefully designed to be clean, visually appealing, and constructed with due care.

Façade designs do not create visual clutter; and the use of the architecture and building colors to stand out and effectively act as signage will not benefit either the business or the whole.

The façade program will not take away identity but will enhance our overall appearance and result in increased pedestrian traffic. Additional measures that are coming up will be discussed in this column space over the next few weeks. As always, your participation is encouraged.