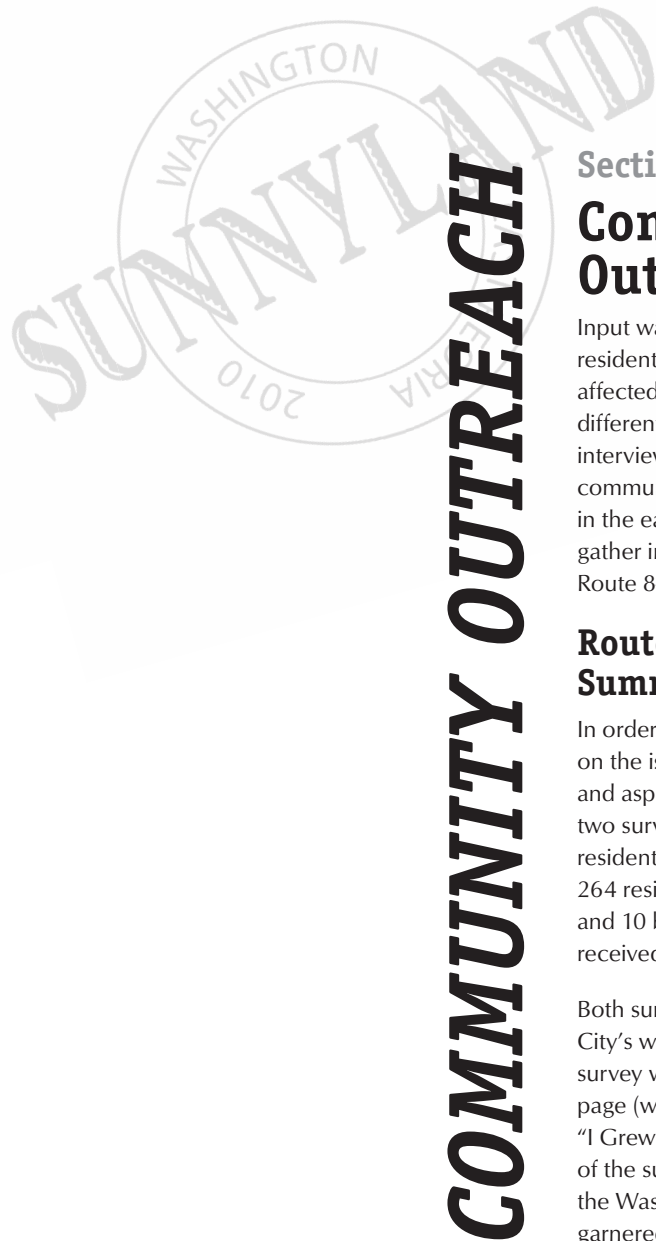




section two

COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Section Two Community Outreach

Input was collected from City staff, residents, business owners, and affected stakeholders through several different outreach activities. Key person interviews, on-line surveys and a community workshop were conducted in the early stages of the process to gather important information about the Route 8-Sunnyland Corridor Study Area.

Route 8 Survey Summary

In order to assess community opinion on the issues, concerns, opportunities, and aspirations regarding IL Route 8, two surveys were administered, one for residents and one for business owners. 264 resident responses were received and 10 business responses were received.

Both surveys were posted on each City's website. Additionally, the resident survey was posted to a Facebook group page (with over 700 members) called, "I Grew Up in Sunnyland". Hard copies of the survey were made available at the Washington Public Library which garnered over 70 responses. The input

and feedback received has provided valuable information for use in the study process. Highlights from the collected summaries are listed below. A complete summary of the collected responses is included in the Appendix.

Resident Survey: Primary Issues

The most common issues cited by respondents were the number of vacancies and the lack of shopping/dining options in Sunnyland. Priorities were to attract new businesses and focus attention on Sunnyland Plaza. Attracting a grocery store (specifically Aldi's) and a drug store were common requests.

Appearance of the corridor was another theme including the lack of property maintenance, desires for a stronger Sunnyland identity and landscaping. Many commented on the welcome progress of road improvements and installation of sidewalks. Support for the Summit Road extension was mentioned frequently.

When asked what kind of new development they would least like to see along Route 8, a majority of respondents indicated residential.

Several recurring themes emerged:

- Vacancies: a lack of businesses, concerns over less desirable uses that may occupy the area due to high vacancies (e.g. title loan companies), and specific desires for a grocery store, drug store and Aldi's
- Appearance: Comments included descriptions of blight, a ghost town appearance, a lack of pride and property maintenance, lack of code enforcement, and an overall assertion that Route 8 looks "run down"
- Sunnyland Plaza: As an area landmark, Sunnyland Plaza was mentioned by name more than any other property. Calls for redevelopment, tenant mix, specific uses, improved appearance, and parking lot improvements
- Lack of connection: Physically, Route 8 is not part of an overall network of roads and has no direct access to I-74. Respondents remarked on the lack of transportation to downtown Washington and the inability to walk to services/shopping

- Sunnyland as an afterthought: A fair number of residents feel disconnected from East Peoria and Washington, they feel that they are not given their due, they feel political disassociation, that they belong to neither city. Several remarks believe that the very name, “Sunnyland” has a stigma of being second class and is a deterrent to redevelopment
- Kids: Special attention was given to the lack of activities for children (including teenagers); and that they were not able to walk to places
- Traffic and safety: travelling from, to and through Route 8 was described as difficult particularly as it pertained to making left hand turns and access from side streets

Business Survey: Primary Issues

Of the business survey respondents, 50% were from the City of East Peoria and 50% were from the City of Washington. The major issue among business owners was the overall appearance of the corridor followed by the need for new development. Respondents also detailed the issue of vacancies and noted a lack of support for existing businesses. Similar to the resident survey, business owners’ most desired type of development was retail, while least desired was residential.

Key Person Interviews

Key person interviews were conducted over the phone in late 2009 and early 2010 to gain insight into the issues and possibilities for Sunnyland/Route 8. The collective memory of and hopes for Sunnyland painted a picture of a once-thriving area that has become physically and economically depressed. The name “Sunnyland” has both pride and stigma attached to it. According to the majority of interviewees, returning Sunnyland to its height involves business attraction and restoring walkability. There was clear recognition of the importance of Sunnyland Plaza as a catalyst for redevelopment in the area. Interviewees expressed desires for businesses with lasting features and broad appeal: family restaurants, state-of-the-art destinations and stores that offer quality, reasonably priced items. IDOT’s work on Route 8 and the proposed extension of Summit Drive were seen as important improvements to better connect Route 8 to the greater area.

Community Open House

A Community Open House was held on April 15th, 2010, to obtain community feedback on existing conditions and preliminary recommendations prepared by the Consultant team. Over 40 participants attended including residents, business owners, property owners, elected officials and City staff.

At the open house, resident and business owner questionnaires were available for those who were not able to complete them before. The draft plan information was presented on large boards with accompanying comment sheets. Staff and members of the Consultant team were available to answer questions and clarify information presented.