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Market Square is a microcosm of our community | Opinion

Donato (Danny) Pietrodangelo Your Turn

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Development v. trees.

The conflict is like one of those killer headaches that lessen, but just won't go away.

The trees say old Tallahassee, Southern charm, the genteel fantasy of Tara – being confronted by the economics of growth. It's the big-small city or the small-big city dilemma.

The pain returns when locals see urban forest clear-cut for housing or strip malls. Proponents say this is what people need and want. Opponents counter: that's what fur retailers said about clubbing baby seals.

But this isn't about trees (or baby seals). It's about another equally traumatic by-product of growth: the demise – commonly at the hands of out-of-town developers – of the clusters of locally-owned shops and restaurants integral to nearby neighborhoods.

It's painful to see places you shop and eat at pack-up and move – or board-up and close. Even if they move nearby, the cohesion is gone – the collective balance that evolved to meet neighborhood commercial and societal needs, respite from time alone in front of a screen.

Take Market Square.

I want to take the out-of-town developers, shake them and scream, “Do we really need another hotel for I-10 passersby? And a neighborhood REI (a nice store) when we have Kevin's down the street and Bass and Academy a quick ride down Capital Circle?

Do we really need a “boutique” movie theater that wants to sell us a 25-pound Nestle Crunch and watered-down cocktails? Just bring back Mugs 'N' Movies, where you could get a cold one and a flick for a few dollars.

Consider the loss. Time was, within the space of one city block, you could:

Have one of the best omelets around for breakfast, browse a used bookstore, meander through a packed antique store, shop for oak shelves, buy athletic shoes and stock up on healthy stuff. For lunch, you could eat Chinese, Japanese, Cuban, a good old USA burger, a ham sandwich or sub. You could leave your shoes for repair, pick-up your dry cleaning, get a haircut and tall tales and take guitar lessons.

You could buy fresh grouper and a decent bottle of wine for dinner, and buy flowers and handmade chocolates to make it special.

For a dinner out, you could eat sushi, comfort food or French cuisine — or sit in a bar with a "Cheers"-like vibe, eat and make new friends at the adjacent table. The, 20-30 somethings could party at a gastro-pub; the sedate, the impromptu sidewalk social club with cocktails and cigar smoke.

The Market Square Pavilion hosted the farmer's market, the chill cook-off, "junk and treasure" shows and the occasional concert by the likes of Tallahassee's own "Sauce Boss," Bill Wharton.

But the biggest loss will be the people — those who worked there and fellow customers, who we came to consider friends.

With indifference and an eye towards profits, the landlords let the place wear. But it was our place, a neighborhood place. With creative foresight, physical upgrades and strategic promotion, the place could have come back.

"Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came." They took that from us.

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