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Cape CRA bidding adieu to Parisian boulevard plan

By JEFF CULL, jcull@news-press.com

The Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency is abandoning its Parisian boulevard concept for the downtown section of Cape Coral Parkway, the city's main east-west corridor in the south.

"It's just not the right time," said Chet Hunt, executive director of the agency. "It's too controversial."

Hunt added that the agency is keeping the innovative design on the table for future consideration. "Maybe 10 years down the road it will work," he said.

The agency's design firm, Dover, Kohl & Partners, had suggested changing the downtown parkway as part of its master plan design.

They recommended removing the center median on the six-lane road — which has four traffic lanes and two parking lanes — and replacing it with smaller medians on either side of four through-traffic lanes. The side medians would protect a single access lane and on-street parking.

Rick Hall, the redevelopment agency's transportation engineer, estimated the new road would cost between \$1 million and \$2 million.

But a number of people objected to the plan. The lack of a median separating the east and west traffic lanes, and the possibility there would be more traffic accidents, was the biggest concern for some. Others felt the price tag was too steep.

"It was a very smart move on their part, walking away from this," said John Barth, a retired engineer and critic of the design. "It would have stopped the whole downtown project."

Now that the agency won't be dealing with the road, it can concentrate on other aspects of the downtown revitalization, Hunt said.

Those areas include:

- Restarting a downtown property improvement program that has been on hold while the master plan was being developed. The plan helps business owners pay for improvements to their property with matching grants from the redevelopment agency.
- Working with potential builders and developers such as Chris Canzano of Villa Realty Group, Inc. who want to conform to the design guidelines of the master plan. Canzano is planning an office building on Cape Coral Parkway.
- Finishing the rewrite of the downtown master plan, which includes new zoning rules and building regulations for the 340-acre redevelopment district.

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