

**Local**

# Interest builds in downtown Cape

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New building rules that will help transform Cape Coral's downtown streets into a pedestrian-friendly urban area are slowly taking shape.

The first draft of the new zoning laws is being reviewed by planners and city officials with the goal of having them put into place within six months. But some of the new codes are a departure from current city rules.

For example, new buildings in the downtown core — an area roughly two blocks on either side of Cape Coral Parkway between Del Prado Boulevard and Coronado Parkway — would have to be at least three stories high.

Planners decided on this measure to create height next to the six-lane-wide Cape Coral Parkway. It also would create the mixed-use — commercial on the ground floor and office or residential above — that downtown officials crave.

"As long as you have wide streets and single story buildings

you'll never have the appearance of a downtown," said Bill Spikowski, a local land planner who is writing the zoning changes for the Community Redevelopment Agency.

But not all downtown land owners are happy with the code changes, which the city council must approve before they can go into effect.

Cape Coral Holdings Inc. has 10 properties in the CRA district and they will be left "economically unbuildable" if the new codes are approved, said Laura Holquist, the firm's president.

She said that one property in the CRA district that's several blocks north of Cape Coral Parkway near Del Prado and out of the core area, is under contract to a user who wants to build a one-story commercial building. The new rules require two-story buildings at the minimum in the zoning district called downtown general.

"It just doesn't work in that area," Holquist said.

The land-use changes will allow

for what town planners Dover, Kohl & Partners of South Miami envision as extensive use of the waterfront, pedestrian-friendly streets and sidewalks, and residential buildings coexisting with commercial structures.

Other changes include:

- Requiring new buildings to place their utilities (i.e. electric, cable and telephone lines) underground.

- Encouraging underground storage of stormwater to eliminate the common retention ponds.

"Those big retention lakes are grossly anti-urban," Spikowski said.

- Easing the requirements for on-site parking.

- Making new buildings directly on streets provide at least 5 feet of cover from awnings, canopies or balconies.

The code changes are the final stage of a downtown master plan that the agency has been developing since last September and the city council approved in March.

They are necessary to ensure

that developers, who may spend a lot of money on a project, will feel secure knowing that what's built next to them will have to conform to some standards, CRA executive director Chet Hunt said.

"It'll give folks assurances that we're going to do a quality job downtown," Hunt said.

And several developers already are looking at big projects downtown.

Developer Russ Whitney is proposing to convert the Avalon Engineering building on Cape Coral Parkway into a town square with shopping, restaurants, offices and a convention center.

The Chamber of Commerce of Cape Coral is working with developer Will Stout to build a 14,000-square-foot welcome center near its current location on Cape Coral Parkway.

A Naples developer is looking to build a mixed use, residential and commercial development in the CRA district.