



September 1, 2010

Consultant has new ideas to revitalize downtown Cape Coral

Small, large changes proposed to CRA

by don ruane

druane@news-press.com

Small, inexpensive changes can add up to a refreshing new ambiance and attract development to downtown Cape Coral, a planning consultant said Tuesday.

"We want to build up what is unique and authentic about Cape Coral," said Bernard Zyscovich of Zyscovich Architects. The firm was hired in March for \$209,000 to come up with 2030 Vision Plan for the future of downtown. Linking the business district with canals, riverfront and open space will create a new sense of place, he said during a presentation for city officials.

Zyscovich is working for the Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency, which promotes the economic development of a three-square mile area of Cape Coral. The firm has been analyzing the district's economics, transportation systems, parking, open space, waterfront and regulatory issues.

"You've created a window of what we can do ourselves to attract new developers to the area. It's right on cue. There's not a beat missing," said CRA board member Frank Dethlefsen. "We can help ourselves. It's relatively inexpensive."

The district should start small by making changes in a four-block area along Cape Coral Parkway between Del Prado and Coronado boulevards. Easy changes include shrinking the size of parking spaces to help change the area's appearance, he said. Making better uses of parking areas owned by the CRA - such as the Big John parking lot between Southeast 47th terrace and Cape Coral Parkway - can give people the sense of being in an urban space instead of a parking lot, he said.

Besides small changes, his team also is recommending shifts to traffic patterns in the downtown area and linking canals in the area.

Vice Chairman Jim Martin moved to accept the work so far and move on to the next phase of finalizing the plan.

City Councilman Marty McClain, the council's liaison to the CRA, commended the work, but pointed out there will be opposition to changing traffic patterns.

A slow approach will help ease the transition, he said.

A final document has to be prepared, Zyscovich said. He suggested a workshop to focus on priorities and to bring in city staff for comments on transportation and other issues.

A previous plan called for mixed-use Mediterranean style developments. People would be able live, work and play in the downtown area. Large projects involving retail and residential uses were proposed, but the economic collapse of the housing and construction industries wiped out the plans.

"This downturn in the economy has been fortunate for the city," said CRA member Rich Greer. "At the time the idea was build it and they will come and that hasn't (worked) out."
