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Agency, owners to discuss best use for Club Square lot

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A proposal to find out just what could be done with a prime piece of downtown Cape Coral real estate launched a lawsuit and put landowners at odds with the city.

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At its regular monthly meeting Tuesday, the Cape Coral Redevelopment Agency decided that it would be best if both sides sat down and talked things out before a judge handed down a ruling concerning use of the 20,400-square-foot parking lot at Club Square.

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"This is a wake-up call for us to get together to discuss our ideas and vision for Club Square," said Bob Greco, redevelopment board chairman.

The redevelopment agency scheduled a June 6 workshop to discuss with the clubs and businesses surrounding the Square what could happen to the 417-space parking lot behind them.

City Attorney Dolores Menendez said she didn't expect any action on the litigation until well after August.

The Community Redevelopment Area covers Cape Coral's downtown from Tudor Drive to the west along both sides of Cape Coral Parkway to the Cape Coral Bridge at the east. A section runs north along Del Prado Boulevard to Southeast 44th Street.

Centrally located in the redevelopment area, Club Square could be a real anchor for a downtown where residents of future condominiums and visitors could park in a free garage and then stroll among shops, walk to work and have dinner in a fine restaurant at the end of the day.

The suit about Club Square's centrally located parking lot was brought because the investment company that controlled most of the land when the city was incorporated deeded it over as a public parking lot.

The city would like a judge to define its rights to the land, Menendez said. If another use was planned for the 5.5 acres such as commercial development or a parking garage, the city would have to know if it could allow it.

Business owners did not want to lose their parking. Club representatives said they were concerned not only by a loss of parking, but by the type of parking a garage would offer.

"Our club members are in their 60s, 70s, 80s," said Larry Bettencourt, Cape Coral Elks Lodge 2597 representative. "They use canes, walkers and crutches. A parking garage is not suitable."

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