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CRA expansion doesn't please Bimini residents

Cape Coral council approves takeover

By JEFF CULL, jcull@news-press.com

The Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency got a boost Monday when the city council unanimously agreed to expand its boundaries.

But that didn't sit well with nearly 80 residents of Bimini Basin whose community was included in the expansion.

"What about the human factor, the quality of life?" said Bob Biancalan, who lives in a condominium unit on the basin. "All they talked about was money."

The Bimini residents didn't like their area being called blighted, a state criteria for being eligible for inclusion in a CRA.

"The Bimini Basin property is not slum or blighted," said Rudy Sandberg, who lives in the Bimini Condominiums on the basin.

But CRA officials were quick to point out that they have to use the term "blighted" because of state law and that the blight that does exist is not on the waterfront.

Other residents feared that the agency could use eminent domain powers to take their homes. But council assured them that those powers are available only to the council, and being in the CRA would not affect those powers.

Council's vote Monday only agrees that the area needs assistance. Creating the new district, which will add about 69 acres of land near Bimini Basin and a nearly equal amount on the east end of the city to the 340-acre CRA district, will be decided next Monday.

CRA officials want those areas because of the extensive waterfront possibilities that the downtown area lacks. With those communities added to the downtown, the agency believes it can provide more waterfront dining, entertainment and condominiums.

"People have told us that the most important thing in the downtown is more public access to the waterfront," said Carolyn Conant, a CRA board member.

Councilman Kevin Davis called the plan "a milestone night for the city. Investors are looking at \$200 million worth of projects there. We want them to know we want their business."

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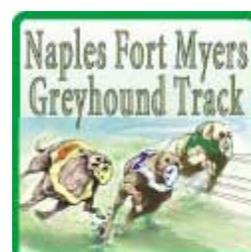
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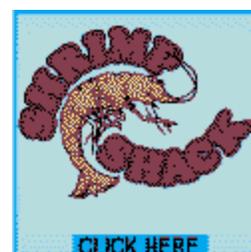
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