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CRA plans to revamp Club Square

Surface parking lot at center of dispute

By Pete Skiba
pskiba@news-press.com
Originally posted on February 17, 2007

The city's popular Club Square, site of many fraternal clubs and La Venezia ballroom, could get a makeover with a piazza, fountains and a multilevel parking garage.

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The city's Community Redevelopment Agency plans to put the controversial Club Square area under an economically feasible design.

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The move came at a strategic planning meeting held in the Cape Coral Association of Realtors building on 46th Lane.

Club members in the past opposed changes to the surface parking lot that serves their membership.

The study means to design a plan that provides for more parking, traffic circulation, utilities and public amenities to attract development. The redevelopment agency hopes to make Club Square the heart of its thriving downtown urban village.

"We need to choose someone to design and go in and pick up the property," said Richard Greer, a board member. "We need to take a stand."

The agency also set a goal to push for city staff to finish work on the rezoning of the entire 432-acre area that stretches from the Cape Coral Bridge along both sides of Cape Coral Parkway to Tudor Court at the west.

Another section sits on both sides of Del Prado Boulevard north to Southeast 44th Street.

Planned projects such as the \$500 million, 14-acre Piazza Di Venezia project, with plans for a hotel, restaurants, condominiums and offices, wait for completion of rezoning. With the rezoning a private developer also could join the redevelopment agency to build at Club Square.

Club Square's 20,400-square-foot parking lot's status remains to be decided by a judge. The city brought a lawsuit to define rights to the land originally deeded by

the city's developer in the 1950s to be used as surface parking.

That parking lot is what the members of Cape Coral Elks Lodge 2596 and other clubs at the square want it to remain.

Club Square will not be alone in the redevelopment agency's economically feasible design plans. The area considered for the study stretches across 30 acres that starts on the south at Miramar Street and heads to 46th Lane at the north.

Vincennes Boulevard makes the east boundary and Candia Street the west.

Eight economic consultant companies replied to requests from the redevelopment agency's board for proposals for the design.

Friday's meeting was a workshop and no action could be taken. The board scheduled the proposals to be discussed at its regular monthly meeting, 5:30 p.m. Tuesday at its 447 Cape Coral Parkway. office.

The plans to provide parking in the area jibed with presentations by expert speakers at the meeting.

Sam Vennero, with more than 25 years planning parking buildings in Orlando and Thomas Kohler, who was an official with the same city's redevelopment agency, said Club Square was the place to start.

"You have to provide a center, a destination," said Kohler, now a real estate research consultant. "Build parking like it was infrastructure. Developers will come and partner with you to do the rest."

The redevelopment agency also plans to discuss these objectives at its Tuesday meeting:

- Putting in place stormwater, alleyway, and traffic plans.
- Complete a master utility plan for electric, water and sewer.
- Develop interim parking lots.
- Assist developers in accumulation of land to develop.

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