

Cape clears way for downtown boom

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Cape Coral has new regulations that city officials hope will trigger a billion dollars' worth of development in the downtown redevelopment district.

The City Council unanimously approved new regulations Monday for the community redevelopment district along Cape Coral Parkway.

Developers can now submit projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars to begin the review process leading to building permits, said Suzanne Kuehn, executive director of the Community Redevelopment Agency.

The agency worked on the new code for the redevelopment area for the past four years. The city's 432-acre redevelopment area sits along both sides of Cape Coral Parkway from Southwest 2nd Court on the west to the Cape Coral Bridge on the east.

"It was tough to create," said Gary Aubuchon, a member of the redevelopment's board and chairman for much of the time the code was under development.

"It's a document that works and one that lets the train leave the station."

But there will be some whistle-stops in the next few months.

The council still has to pass some resolutions setting things such as acceptable colors for buildings and fees for the review procedures, Kuehn said.

In addition, differences with the state's Department of Community Affairs over increasing the number of residential units allowed in the district from 2,027 to 11,126 units must be resolved. The department said in a letter to the city earlier this month that more guidelines are needed to control the number of units.

IN OTHER ACTION

Cape Coral City Council members also took these actions on Monday:

- Defeated by a 4-4 vote a proposed ordinance setting up procedures for residents who wanted to work with neighbors to line their streets with trees.
- Amended the comprehensive land-use plan map to change the use of the property at 1050-1052 Dolphin Drive, 5810-5816 and 902 Dolphin Drive from single-family use to parks and recreation use. The city acquired the land to expand the Cape Coral Yacht Club complex.
- Approved rezonings from single-family to multi-family for property at 1508 and 1332 Andalusia Blvd.
- Approved four contracts worth a total of about \$295,000 for Hurricane Wilma-related expenses including cleanup.
- Set 5:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 28 for public hearings on: ordinances to change the land-use map to show a middle school and a high school at 712 Trafalgar Parkway and a middle school at 214 N.W. 20th Ave. and for a public hearing to hold city council elections in November of odd-numbered years starting in 2007.

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"The new code is a fundamental first step and framework for the development of downtown," said City Councilman Jim Jeffers, the council's liaison to the community redevelopment board of directors.

Six speakers in addition to Aubuchon spoke up for the code. A representative of the Cape Coral Chamber of Commerce read a statement endorsing the code.

No one spoke against the project.

Cindy Swink, a resident of 20 years, said the city has changed and become younger. There is a "very strong demand" for more shopping and dining, she said.

Among the projects planned for the district are the Piazza di Venezia by developers of both hope to start construction in March 2007.

The Piazza is a \$300 million project planned for the area bounded by Cape Coral Parkway, Coronado Boulevard, Victoria Street and Manor Street. It will include a hotel, convention center, movie theater, condos, retail and office space and a parking garage.

Cape Villagio is planned for Southeast 17th Place and 46th Lane. The \$380 million project includes four, 12-story condos with shops, restaurants, offices and park and a 400-car parking garage.