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Cape leaders tackle downtown issues

Communication, slowness on codes plague redevelopment efforts

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Cape Coral officials met and confirmed their desire to build a thriving downtown, while city staff gave a firm commitment to have a stormwater master plan ready by April at the latest.

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The Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency Board met with City Council and its staff for the first of what could become regular workshops, on Thursday at 6 p.m. in La Venezia ballroom, on Club Square.

The redevelopment board had felt there was a lack of communication between itself, the council and staff. Major hurdles discussed at the meeting were development rules, or codes, stormwater and traffic.

All were problems to the rejuvenation of the downtown, which Suzanne Kuehn, redevelopment agency executive director, said seemed to be taking longer than it should.

Community Redevelopment Agency Board members agreed.

"We don't seem to be able to walk lockstep together," said John Jacobsen, a board member. "We want to get going."

One of the hurdles discussed was the redevelopment area's zoning and the building codes that go along with the zones in the area.

Three zones are planned for the area, but although adopted by City Council in September 2005 they have to be mapped to be legal and apply.

No one offered any explanation during the meeting on why the mapping has taken so long.

"How can we invest and develop (in the CRA) if we don't have the codes," said Joe Mazurkiewicz, former city mayor and owner of BJM Consultants.

The codes spell everything out from how far a building can be set back from its property line to what kind of materials can be used to build the structure.

The three zones to be mapped — Core, Edge and Gateway — allow for six-story buildings. Gateway also allows for 12-story buildings. All could have condominiums above retail stores, offices and restaurants.

The idea is, and has remained, from the redevelopment area's inception at least 18 years ago that it would be a place where people would live, work and be entertained.

The codes just received a boost by having any glitches or errors of language in the more than 130-page regulation book ironed out in an ordinance of the same name.

The glitch ordinance was adopted by the city planning and zoning commissioners Wednesday. It must be adopted by City Council.

Another ordinance to finally iron out any errors in language in the building codes would be necessary.

What to do about stormwater in the redevelopment area running along Cape Coral Parkway from the Cape Coral Bridge west to Tudor Court also needs to be ironed out. The area also extends north from Cape Coral Parkway along Del Prado Boulevard to 44th Street.

Kuehn, along with Richard Orth, project manager for the redevelopment agency staff, said the redevelopment

agency could ascertain developments meet all Southwest Florida Water Management regulations in a timely fashion.

Chuck Pavlos, city public works director, believed that a master stormwater plan remained a better way to go. Both City Council and the board agreed.

The combined bodies gained a promise from Pavlos that one would be done by March or April.

On traffic, the city has a study entering its second phase. It is confronted with the desire to make traffic flow easily to the bridges, while trying to build an area where people can walk to work and shop.

Nearly at the end of the meeting, Rich Greer, a redevelopment agency board member, said he felt the two bodies were on the way to fixing the communication between them.

Another workshop was planned for March.

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