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Cape officials plan chats on downtown

Traffic suggestions should be ready next year

By **DON RUANE**

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It'll be about this time next year before a consultant is ready to suggest ways to improve traffic circulation in downtown Cape Coral, the city's downtown redevelopment board learned Tuesday.

In the meantime, there will be plenty of opportunities for members of the public to tell the consultant what they think needs to be done, according to city Financial Services Director Mark Mason.

"They'll be doing a lot of charettes," Mason told the Community Redevelopment Agency's board. A charrette is a brainstorming session involving members of the community who offer their input on urban planning and design.

One of the board's goals is to make downtown a pedestrian-friendly place, but it's wrestling with parking as well as traffic issues.

It will be important for people who are stuck in traffic now to show up when public input is taken, board member John Jacobson said.

The city's Selection Advisory Board, which includes Mason, recently selected Gray-Calhoun of Tampa to conduct the study. A contract and a price have to be negotiated and then approved by the city council, Mason said. The study should be completed next February.

"We're getting a real deal with this," said board member Gary Aubuchon, who attended the Selection Advisory Committee meeting to hear presentations from the consultants who wanted the contract. Gray-Calhoun has some good ideas, he said.

Meanwhile, the board is trying to wrap up new building codes for the district, which stretches along the Cape Coral Parkway corridor from the Caloosahatchee River to about Bimini Basin and for a short stretch north on Del Prado Boulevard from Cape Coral Parkway.

The board plans to hold a workshop at 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 1, to discuss changes. Once the board agrees on the code, it must undergo a review by the city's planning staff and review by the planning and zoning board and the city council.

The work is 90 percent complete, city attorney Dolores Menendez said.

The agency has been working to overhaul the code for about three years.

"The plan was to allow parking on the street until it became a problem and then build a garage," said Bill Nolan, a retired city planner who worked on the revisions. The idea, he said, was to make the downtown look busy, but people often want to park right next to their destination rather than walk a little extra

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distance, Nolan said.

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