



To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

<<
[Back](#)

Downtown firms look to move elsewhere CRA rules don't fit industrial businesses

By Pete Skiba
pskiba@news-press.com
Originally posted on March 26, 2006

It isn't a deluge, but smaller businesses have started to pull out of the downtown area in search of more accommodating locations.

Others have adopted a wait-and-see outlook.

The Community Redevelopment Agency plans to revitalize the downtown with architectural design rules to make it visually appealing to pedestrians. Plans call for the 420-acre area to be a place where people can live, shop in upscale stores, go to a movie and dine in fine restaurants.

It seems that quite a few gasoline-alley-type businesses won't fit without major architecture fixes, if at all.

"Good-looking buildings are nice," said Trebing Tile owner Ralf Trebing. "But they are expensive and you have to have the kinds of businesses in them that will have a return on the investment."

Trebing owns three boxy, industrial-style buildings in the redevelopment area. One of his tenants is leaving because he believes he would not get an approval from city officials allowing him to repair cars.

The redevelopment agency balked when Warren Rivera proposed a special exception to the redevelopment rules about a year ago for his 4x4 Super Center.

It isn't that repair shops are forbidden, but they need to be so hidden as to be unrecognizable.

"I showed up for meetings and was told it was postponed," Rivera said "We have auto repair shops around us, but my lease is up in August and I'm leaving."

A FEW CRA RULES

- Loading docks, service areas and trash bins must be hidden from street view
- Utilities must go underground
- Certain types of fences, like chain link fences, will not be allowed
- New buildings must be at least three stories
- Concrete, stamped concrete or pavers are encouraged for sidewalks
- Palm trees cannot be more than 50 percent of landscaping
- Balconies must be open and not have air conditioning. Roofed balconies may have screens or latticework enclosures.

DELIVERING YOUR WORLD

- ▶ [Subscribe to The News-Press](#)
- ▶ [Signup for breaking or daily email news](#)
- ▶ [Printer friendly version](#)
- ▶ [Email this article](#)

..... ADVERTISEMENT

Rivera's business sits in the redevelopment's northern area that runs north along Del Prado Boulevard from Cape Coral Parkway to Southeast 44th Terrace. The major section of the area stretches along both sides of Cape Coral Parkway from Southwest Second Court to the Cape Coral Bridge.

The three-year-old, Southeast 16th Place business is in one of Trebing's boxes with an industrial-looking chain-link fence that has white slats through the spaces in the fence.

Its garage doors open on an alley separating it from at least three automotive repair businesses that have been in the neighborhood long enough to have their operations allowed, or "grandfathered" in, under the current rules for development.

Rivera's business already has vehicle lifts that were put in against the rules, said Chris DeManche, city planner. The business needs the special exception to the rules that Rivera applied for to repair vehicles.

The business now sells and installs accessories such as side steps that act like old fashioned running boards, grill guards and trailer hitches on sport utility vehicles and pickups in the redevelopment area.

The redevelopment board and the city's Planning & Zoning Commission passed the buck back and forth enough so that Rivera decided he was getting nowhere.

At the redevelopment board's meeting Tuesday, the board voted to advise planning and zoning commissioners to postpone Rivera's request. Again.

It had been postponed twice before by the commissioners and twice by the redevelopment agency board.

The vote came after board members wrestled with ways they could get Rivera's request to match the rules for the redevelopment area. Stuccoed cement walls to hide any cars waiting for repair from street view and other beautification measures were considered.

Rivera's request remains scheduled to be heard by the commissioners April 5.

Rivera joins Cape Scooter and Mower owner Jeff Free in moving out. Free moved his shop to 939 Country Club Blvd. after he got the impression his type of lawn mower sales and repair business wasn't wanted in the evolving downtown.

"It is about time we put our foot down," said board member Jason Tramonte. "It is about time we weeded these businesses (businesses needing exceptions to the rules) out."

Tramonte plans to move his architect business into Orchid Commons at 4356 S.E. 16th Place. He designed the building with its condominiums above stores and offices to the look the redevelopment area's board wishes to encourage. It is stuccoed concrete block in a Mediterranean-village style.

Orchid Commons is the first mixed-use project for the downtown. Other more complicated projects could change the face of the downtown into a

more sophisticated-looking area with 12-story hotels, offices, condominiums, restaurants, arts centers and a convention center.

The changes don't frighten other repair-shop owners along Del Prado Boulevard. They have no plans to leave.

"I've been here for 33 years," said Ken Schuman, 62, owner of Ken's Auto Repair. "If I sell when I retire, we can go up six stories on these lots."

Repair shops such as Tire City, Ken's Auto Repair and Quality Auto Center back on the alley across from Rivera's business. The owner of Quality Auto Center, Nick Muhlenbruch, 44, agreed with Schuman and was glad to see the redevelopment agency bringing people downtown.

More people means more business. He leases his shop and hopes to buy it.

"I don't think it is fair to the customer to force all the repair shops into the same industrial parks," Muhlenbruch said. "All the people moving here need services."

The redevelopment board isn't against services located downtown, said board member Gary Aubuchon. It just doesn't want them to look like the greasy, tire-strewn gas stations of old.

"Our land-use codes are specific and we certainly don't want to continue the old looks," Aubuchon said. "The east side of the street has the new look and with exception the west side is too industrial looking."

<<
[Back](#)