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Downtown to get new look

Projects aimed at luring more pedestrians

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A half-billion dollars in new projects proposed for Cape Coral's downtown district will change the area rapidly in the next year.

"In the first quarter of next year, you will see cranes on the horizon downtown from Skyline Boulevard," said Chet Hunt, outgoing CRA director.

The CRA plan calls for multilevel buildings with a Mediterranean flair. Integrated parking garages, balconies, awnings and other structures that provide protection for pedestrians are all part of the plan to make downtown more modern and pedestrian-friendly. Restaurants and other businesses will be integrated with residential buildings.

CRA contributions to the projects range from \$250 to \$500,000.

The projects include individual business owners who are remodeling and developers who are working on new projects of all sizes.

Hunt already has files on more than 20 projects, but not all of them are ready to make their plans public.

New developments

Construction is scheduled to start this week on a new \$1.3 million office and residential development at Southeast 46th Street and Southeast 16th Place.

David Devic, who is the owner and builder for the project, expects the building will be completed by July or August. It will include five offices and five residential units.

Devic, who had been building in the area for 30 years, received \$10,000 from the CRA to redesign his building. He was intrigued by the idea of making Cape Coral resemble the manicured, upscale look of Naples.

A larger \$5 million retail and professional center will be starting construction at Southeast 15th Avenue and Southeast 47th Terrace when Devic's project is scheduled to be completed.

Mark Steinberg, owner of Fremar Construction, plans to erect four buildings connected by courtyards and breezeways. The tallest building will be five stories.

Steinberg, who has lived in Cape Coral for 17 years, was also interested in revamping the city's image.

"The downtown area certainly needs a pedestrian-friendly amenity such as The Bell Tower," Steinberg said, referring to the Fort Myers shopping and dining area.

He based the design of the 23,000-square-foot development on The Bell Tower Shops and several European villages he visited.

"It's a place where people can walk through in the evening and have a latte and look at a boutique," Steinberg said.



• Andy Velasquez, right, and Adrian Quezada work on landscaping surrounding the new ScreenPrint Plus building Monday morning in Cape Coral. ScreenPrint Plus received a \$7,000 grant from the Cape Coral Downtown Community Redevelopment Agency to design the building to meet new CRA standards. The new building has a tile roof and is more Mediterranean than the previous glass and metal roof structure. *TERRY ALLEN WILLIAMS/The News-Press*

Bob Snow of Harbor Construction is planning Cape Villagio, one of the largest developments in the works for downtown. The two 12-story buildings will include integrated parking garages, 60,000 square feet of commercial space and 120 condominiums.

The three-acre site east of Del Prado Boulevard between Southeast 47th Street and Southeast 46th Lane is vacant. Snow expects to begin construction in one year.

"It's probably the only piece that's ready to go," Snow said. "We will be the first ones out of the box."

Some other projects require the developer to assemble pieces of land. Snow expects to build the project over five years, but tenants should be able to start moving in within three years.

"It's a developer's dream," Snow said about the CRA district. "We usually build residential. We really would never have gone into downtown."

Cape Villagio's concept is to create a neighborhood that will include shopping, four restaurants, and a pool and jogging trail on top of the parking garages for residents.

Snow plans to seek out small, local business owners instead of chain stores. He hopes to create the type of development where residents can live upstairs and operate their business downstairs.

"You look around at old cities and that is how they developed," Snow said.

A new Club Square concept developed by John Arnold of Marco Island is the centerpiece of the CRA plan for revitalizing downtown Cape Coral.

The CRA is promoting the plan to replace the asphalt parking lot just north of Southeast 47th Terrace with brick walkways, underground utilities, a parking garage and shops. The city is still working on legal issues relating to building the parking garage.

Individual businesses

ScreenPrint Plus on Southeast 47th Street will complete its renovations by mid-November. The company received a \$7,000 CRA grant to add a tile roof and improved landscaping when it built a 9,000-square-foot addition to its existing 7,000-square-foot building.

"It's a positive step into the future of Cape Coral," said vice president Mitch Williamson. "All of Cape Coral will start looking that way."

Joni Johnson, owner of B&D Interiors on Southeast 47th Terrace, is already in the process of remodeling the interior of her building. She hopes to start on the exterior in early 2005.

"We want to stay consistent with what they have planned for downtown," Johnson said.

She is not eligible for CRA funds because her building is not directly on the street and will not be moved.

Johnson is planning to expand her business in the next few years onto property she owns on Cape Coral Parkway. That project would be eligible for CRA funding.

Rack 'em Billiards on Southeast 47th Terrace is also planning to remodel its building. The owner could not be reached for comment.

Other businesses along Cape Coral Parkway recently renovated their buildings to meet CRA requirements.

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