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Move to clarify rules aids redevelopment

Will allow developers to go ahead with projects

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Cape Coral's rejuvenation efforts got a boost Wednesday when the Planning and Zoning Commission recommended that council adopt the regulations necessary for the Community Redevelopment Area to move forward with more than a billion dollars' worth of projects.

The commission recommended 5-0 that City Council adopt the necessary zoning and building regulations.

The hope is that the area will become a thriving downtown where people live in condominiums, work in offices, dine in fine restaurants and catch a movie or a concert.

Council could vote on the new zoning regulations sometime this month.

The zoning and the codes spell out the building heights and the space they must be set back from the street.

Other regulations include the kinds of businesses and residences allowed in the zone.

"This has been 18 years in the making. There hasn't been much dirt moved in that time," said Rich Greer, a redevelopment agency board member. "This will start the momentum. We are going to make (it) happen."

REDEVELOPMENT AREA TIMELINE

- 1959: Gulf American Land Corporation builds eight model homes in the area. The highest price: \$26,250 for a three-bedroom, two-bath home. Surfside Restaurant opens.
- 1960: Cape Coral Shopping Plaza breaks ground, home of the first supermarket and owned by the Tabors, and a statue of Big John. Nautilus Motel opens. Fishing pier opens.
- 1961: First fire station and library open. Cape Coral Bridge is built.
- 1962: Faith United Presbyterian opens.
- 1963: U.S. Post Office opens at 47th Terrace.
- 1964: Cape Coral Bank opens.
- 1986: Cape Coral City Council declares the downtown area blighted. City Council takes on role of Community Redevelopment Agency.
- 1987: First redevelopment plan adopted; trust fund for tax increment funding established.
- 1994: City Council appoints the Community Redevelopment Agency Board of Commissioners.
- 1996: Redevelopment agency sponsors Big John's parking lot landscaping; sidewalk beautification completed.
- 1995: Street landscaping along Cape Coral Parkway begins first phase.
- 2000: Street landscaping along Cape Coral Parkway begins second phase.
- 2002: Community Redevelopment Plan prepared by Dover, Kohl & Partners. Bus

With the new regulations, there would be six zones, mainly for 6- to 12-story buildings.

The skyline could change dramatically within the 432-acre downtown area, with projects such as:

- VK Development's 12-story high-rise condominiums, with at least one six-story building for parking and retail shops in the Bimini Basin area.
- The Piazza Di Venezia project by RTS Inc., that would include a hotel, condominium, restaurant and office complex of more than a million square feet on 20 acres in the Atlantic Court area.

With the adoption of the building codes, other major developers such as Robbie Lee, of Island Development LLC, might find smoother going for building their multimillion-dollar projects.

Lee's largest project, Village Square, could cost more than \$210 million. Plans call for 156 condominiums and 330,000 square feet of retail stores, offices and restaurants in mid-rise buildings.

Lee plans to build Village Square along Cape Coral Boulevard in the area currently occupied by Fifth Third Bank, a city-owned parking lot and a car wash between Southeast Eighth Court and Southeast Ninth Place.

"Now that we know what is expected, this will help us move to construction faster," Lee said.

The downtown redevelopment area stretches along both sides of Cape Coral Parkway from the Cape Coral Bridge on the east to Tudor Court to the west. A portion extends north along Del Prado Boulevard to 44th Street.

The process could really speed things up, said Bob Peterson, a developer with the Cape Villagio project, featuring twin 12-story towers with condos, retail and office space. The project, which could start in 2008, would be between Southeast 47th Street and Southeast 46th Lane at 17th Place.

transfer station completed.

- 2003: Redevelopment Area expanded to present boundaries. Its 432 acres cover Cape Coral's downtown from Tudor Drive to the west along both sides of Cape Coral Parkway to the Cape Coral Bridge at the east. A section runs north along Del Prado Boulevard to Southeast 44th Street.
- 2003: Cape Coral Parkway widening is completed.
- 2005: City Council updates the Community Redevelopment Plan. The area is divided into three districts. The core district allows for six-story buildings as does the edge district. The gateway district's buildings can have up to 12 stories.
- 2006: Hampton Inn & Suites, four-story, 75-room hotel at 619 S.E. 47th Terrace, opens. It is the first hotel to open in the city in 20 years.
- 2006: Orchid Commons, a \$1.5 million residential and office condominium building at 4356 S.E. 16th Place, completed.
- March 7: Cape Coral Planning & Zoning Commissioners recommend adoption of zoning and building regulations to City Council.

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"We had to apply for variances from the old requirements that were in effect so that we could meet the new ones that were coming," Peterson said. "The new ones would have made it less expensive and faster to get approvals."

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