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## New head of CRA says plans in great shape

Kuehn takes on Hampton Inn plans first; calls area 'paradise'

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After a week on the job, the new head of Cape Coral's downtown revitalization program says she feels like she is in the perfect place.

"I feel like I stumbled onto paradise," said Suzanne Kuehn, who took over as director of the city's Community Redevelopment Agency Jan. 18.

"She knows her stuff," said Richard F. Kast, the CRA's marketing coordinator. "She's going to prove a valuable asset."

As director, Kuehn, 59, will continue to shepherd through downtown growth plans already under way by CRA. She replaces Chet Hunt, who left in November of last year for a similar job in Naples.

Kuehn inherits numerous development projects already on the drawing table for the CRA district that stretches on each side of Cape Coral Parkway from the Caloosa-hatchee River to Bimini Basin. Some of those projects include condominiums, retail outlets, office buildings and restaurants.

At the top of the CRA projects list, however, is the proposed construction of a 75-room Hampton Inn and Suites at 619 S.E. 47th Terrace, for which investors are seeking partial public funding from tax money set aside for economic development purposes. On Tuesday night, investors were present at the CRA board of directors' monthly meeting to accept a \$651,880 offer in TIF, or tax incremental funding, money for the project.

With some alterations to the already-presented architectural plans to better comply with CRA aesthetic standards, developers could reap another \$220,000 in TIF money. But any delays by going back to the drawing board could be risky. Investor Fred Hirshovits told the board Tuesday that finances dictate the hotel open by the height of the tourist season.

"We cannot afford to miss next season," Hirshovits said.

He wants the doors to open in December of this year or January 2006 at the latest.

Kuehn said the Hampton Inn project, which could be the first new Cape Coral hotel in 20 years, is vital to the city's development. It is estimated to bring in 30,000 people per year and employ as many as 20 people.

Meantime, Kuehn will continue her focus on learning the revisions to development regulations for the CRA district proposed under Hunt's leadership.

"Getting that to adoption is crucial," she said of the new land development codes awaiting city approval. "My main concern is getting familiar with that."

Kast, who served as interim director after Hunt's departure, said Kuehn has begun

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looking at additional ways to supplement funding for redevelopment projects. Kuehn is proposing that the CRA seek available state and federal grant money for cleanup and development of areas that may have environmental contamination.

"She will do a lot for this city." Kast said.

Kuehn, who will receive an annual salary of \$80,000, was one of two people interviewed for CRA director. After Kuehn's interview for the position, board member Carolyn Conant said she was impressed with Kuehn's experience with issues that Cape Coral is now facing.

Kuehn brings nearly 20 years of city development experience with her from Daytona Beach, where she began working as a redevelopment officer. She worked her way up to administrator, overseeing a half dozen development boards in the northern Florida city. She decided to leave for Cape Coral because the leadership needed to accomplish things was missing in Daytona Beach, she said.

"After 19 years in Dayton, I really needed a change," she said.

The biggest hurdles now facing Kuehn and CRA, the new director said, is selling the dreams for downtown Cape Coral and ensuring that any development is quality development benefiting both public and private interests.

"That's what I'm here to do; make the dream a reality," Kuehn said.

Kuehn, who has a degree in architectural history from Syracuse University in her native New York, said she is encouraged by the cooperation and vision shared by both public and private entities in Cape Coral, something that was missing in Daytona Beach.

"From what I've seen, everybody's captured the vision," she said of the plans for redeveloping downtown Cape Coral.

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