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[Back](#)

[Cape Coral](#)

Palm Bay man accepts CRA director position

Redevelopment agency's first choice took job in Tucson, Ariz.

By Denise L. Scott

dscott@news-press.com

Originally posted on January 01, 2008

The Downtown Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency will get its new executive director this month — but it's not who the board initially recommended.

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Chris Norton, economic development director for the city of Palm Bay on the east coast, has accepted the position.

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He was the CRA board's second choice.

The first choice, Glenn F. Lyons of Calgary, Alberta, turned down the offer to accept a job in Tucson, Ariz.

"(Lyons) thought it would be a more interesting and challenging job for his capabilities," CRA Chairman John Jacobsen said.

"It's a bigger city with more stuff for him to do. Chris Norton has happily accepted." Jacobsen said Norton's starting salary will be \$95,000.

"I think he's a superb choice. His experience is literally perfect for us," Jacobsen said. "Palm Bay suffers from all the woes Cape Coral suffers — being a large pre-platted community without a large downtown."

Norton agreed that Palm Bay and Cape Coral have the same growth issues. He knew he wanted the job when he toured Cape Coral and met CRA board members and staff.

"I found them to be amongst the most passionate board members I've ever met," he said.

Norton said he shares their goals for redeveloping downtown as an area to live, work, shop and be entertained.

Jacobsen said Norton, who moved to Florida from Boston in 1980, is knowledgeable about this state's rules and regulations.

"He is literally 'plug and play' for us," he said. "He should be able to hit the ground running, knowing all the issues."

Richard Orth, CRA project manager and interim executive director, agreed that it should be a smooth transition from former Executive Director Suzanne Kuehn, who left in December to become development director for Johnson City, Tenn.

"We anticipate (Norton's) guidance and direction in moving our existing projects forward," Orth said, referring to such things as the Southeast 47th Terrace streetscape project.

"He has a lot of city and municipal experience in development. His personality really meshed with the staff and CRA board. We really look forward to his arrival." Jacobsen said Norton will attend the CRA board's next meeting Jan. 8 and will start the job Jan. 21.

Norton said redevelopment means change, and he understands that people may be hesitant about it. He plans to build consensus not only with city officials and staff, but also with downtown property owners.

"I'll be walking the district, getting to know the business owners," he said. "It's not just one person. It really takes groups that have common expectations."

<<
[Back](#)