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Zoning good news for Cape developers

Mixed use expected to revitalize downtown

By DAN DeLUCA, [ddeluca@news-press.com](mailto:ddeluca@news-press.com)

The vision of a revitalized downtown area in Cape Coral became much clearer Tuesday.

The city council's decision to allow mixed-use buildings in the 340-acre Community Redevelopment Agency area served as a welcome mat for developers exploring a variety of projects downtown.

One is a \$140 million high-rise condominium with businesses on the ground floor, said Joe Mazurkiewicz, a consultant to the developer.

That project alone would more than double the value of downtown real estate, which was worth \$106 million in 2002.

The development is slated for the Bimini Basin area, which is still not part of the CRA district, but will be if the council votes to expand its boundaries next month.

The new CRA codes are not expected to be completed and approved for at least six to eight months. That made an interim zoning measure a necessity, Councilwoman Alex LePera said.

"We wouldn't want (developers) to lose interest," LePera said. "I think the CRA is working very hard to give the community what it wants."

CRA officials have been busy attracting new developments to the city since March, when the council approved its master plan.

To lure those developers, the agency designed new land-use regulations, refined parking rules and devised ways to reduce stormwater retention that often robs developers of valuable land.

But it's the new land-use codes that are the key to what will happen downtown. Those rules will allow mixed-use buildings, where commercial and residential uses can be combined, and ease many restrictions on builders.

More people in the downtown area are music to the ears of business owners who support the CRA's plan.

"It's what the city needed," said Chris Canzano, owner of Villa Realty Group Inc. "Any successful revitalization revolves around pedestrian traffic. I think (downtown) is going to be an exciting place in the future."

Canzano is doing his part to fulfill the CRA's design guidelines. He plans to break ground on a 12,000-square-foot, Mediterranean-style office building next month.

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Riverside Bank chairman Elmer Tabor said it is essential that any downtown building plan include more retail businesses.

“Cape Coral has done an excellent job of telling everyone to go to Fort Myers and shop,” he said.

“Hopefully this will help people realize there are two directions on that bridge and bring them here to shop.”

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