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## Downtown utilities on agenda

Panel to meet with utility companies

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Before Cape Coral's downtown can see redevelopment, it needs to see utilities, officials say.

Members of the Cape Coral Downtown Community Development have planned an all-day workshop Saturday with representatives from utility companies to hash out just what can and should be done in downtown to upgrade utilities.

"We want to get all the partners in the room together and get everybody to agree to a common goal and vision," said John Jacobsen, the chairman of the CRA board. "We're going to step back and let the utilities come to a common consensus."

One of those utility companies, the Tampa-based TECO Energy, has been working with the CRA and Cape Coral officials on the possibility of extending gas service south along Del Prado Boulevard to the downtown district.

"The meetings have been very positive," said Richard Orth, a project manager with the CRA.

TECO representatives met with Cape Coral engineers earlier this month, according to Cape Coral spokesperson Connie Barron, to discuss the right of way issues inherent in extending gas lines.

Officials from TECO could not immediately be reached for comment.

Currently, businesses in downtown that require gas service now have to install freestanding gas containers. The gas containers raise a host of safety, convenience and cost issues, Orth said.

"Having the appropriate sized infrastructure is imperative for redevelopment," Orth said. "It's one of the first problems you look to correct."

The gas joins other infrastructure deficiencies, including water and sewer, electricity and traffic capacity, that the CRA wants to address, Orth said.

The CRA's Saturday meeting is the latest step in putting together a complete plan for upgrading utilities in the CRA district to attract more investment. That plan, which Orth said is about 70 percent done, should be completed by the end of the year.

In a presentation to City Council earlier this month, Jacobsen outlined the

goals for the CRA, citing the organization's push to attract large-scale transformative projects to downtown Cape Coral. That kind of development, Jacobsen had said, would require the right type of utilities.

"It could make all the difference for a restaurant, or for residential components," Jacobsen said.

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