



May 19, 2010

Cape Coral advised to think small

CRA told to focus on filling open sites

by don ruane

druane@news-press.com

Smaller might be better for the short-term success of Cape Coral's downtown redevelopment district.

Filling in the open spaces instead of trying to land a major project will help the spacious district, said consultant Bernard Zyscovich.

He was hired for \$203,900 to develop a plan for the next 20 years.

He reported Tuesday on his preliminary findings and observations to the Community Redevelopment Agency.

"If I was a one-man CRA, I would put 75 percent of all our money toward job growth," said CRA board member Dan Creighton. "Employment will solve all ills."

Zyscovich needs to talk more with national businesses to find out what they want from Cape Coral, Creighton said.

But board member Jack Evans said he liked what he heard.

"Large projects probably aren't going to come to Cape Coral right now. They take a long time," Evans said. "With enough of those the vitality of our community increases."

A small project would be a business such as a Barnes & Noble bookstore, Evans said.

"You have a very long street with a low density," he said.

Cape Coral Parkway stretches about 2.25 miles within the district.

"It still feels very undeveloped and very vacant," Zyscovich said.

On the positive side the district has a good street pattern that can make it a town center, Zyscovich said.

"You've got all the elements you need. What you don't have are the investors," Zyscovich said.

Only 18 buildings over 10,000 square feet are in the district, which scatters the retail sites, said economist Eric Liff. He is part of the review team.

The district also has to attract some of the 40,000 or so people who use Veterans Parkway to visit downtown, Liff said.

The city should look for opportunities in fields such as health care, government and even the marine industry as a way to build up the area, Liff said.
