

# Cape Coral's plan for CRA takes shape

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Written by  
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Critics of the Cape Coral City Council's takeover of the Community Redevelopment Agency in October complained about the city's lack of a plan for the downtown district.

On Tuesday, City Manager John Szerlag delivered the beginnings of that plan at the second CRA meeting with Council as the new board of commissioners. Szerlag also serves as the agency's acting executive director.

Among Szerlag's proposals was to halt the makeover of the Big John's plaza parking lot until city finances improve and scrap altogether a project to pave portions of medians along Cape Coral Parkway.

Several CRA commissioners objected to the idea of abandoning the paved medians, however.

Councilman Kevin McGrail said he feared pedestrians would continue to trudge through the medians during large downtown events when Cape Coral Parkway is shut down.

"If we don't put those median enhancements in place, people will tear up the improvements and plantings that you put in the medians to go back and forth," McGrail said.

Szerlag, believing crosswalks would be involved, said it was a safety issue.

"On Cape Coral Parkway, there's a lot of traffic traversing back and forth and if you put a brick, or brick paver, or demarcation where

He also said experience told him people would cross where it's convenient.

"We know for a fact they don't use the intersections," he said.

The CRA's former board of commissioners approved the project in September, voting to spend no more than \$10,000 on construction at nine locations from Del Prado Boulevard to Coronado Parkway.

Another project, voted through in April, would have, among other things, created an open-air pavilion in the Big John's plaza parking lot to host festivals and live music in an effort to draw foot traffic downtown.

The price for that effort, which Szerlag recommended be placed on hold, was \$92,700.

Commissioners also expressed support on Tuesday for creating an advisory board composed of downtown business owners.

"I think the input from the business community is critical," McGrail said. "The other advantage (is), if at some future point in Cape Coral's evolution, we form additional CRA districts, we can have advisory boards for each that recognize the unique characteristics of each of those districts."

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