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Cape lot plan gets a push

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Customer Service

CRA wants to determine legality of town center

By OSVALDO PADILLA, opadilla@news-press.com
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Redevelopment officials took the first step Tuesday toward converting a pothole-pocked lot into a Cape Coral town center complete with a fountain, brick-paved walkways and a 900-car parking garage.

The garage proposed for the Club Square parking lot would be the first of its kind in the Cape. It could cost from \$10 million to \$14 million, according to one consultant's estimates.

The parking lot has been trapped in a state of legal limbo for years, making city leaders unsure whether they could develop it.

On Tuesday, the Community Redevelopment Agency voted to ask the city council to go to court to clear up the murky legal status of the parking lot just north of S.E. 47th Terrace between Ninth Place and 11th Place.

"Cape Coral has control on behalf of the public, but it's not the same as owning it outright," City Attorney Dolores Menendez said.

The lot is deeded to the city for public parking use. That opens the city up to lawsuits if it decides to build anything other than parking on the site.

Menendez wants the city to ask the circuit court for a judgment on the lot to clear up the legal questions. The judgement would protect the city by stating clearly that it could use the lot for other purposes such as an amphitheater, a farmers market and a pond.

The city council will have to vote to approve the CRA's request later this year.

Club Square has 417 parking spaces. According to the CRA plans, a multilevel parking garage could provide more than double that amount while taking up far less space.

Marco Island developer John Arnold has bought several properties in and around the lot. He has taken the lead in converting Club Square into a European-style village with mixed-use buildings with restaurants and shops and a few expensive condos.

"The parking garage, the construction of it would have to be the start of this," said Scott Hertz, vice president of Powell Construction, which already built the Grape Escape building in the square.

City Financial Services Director Mark Mason said CRA revenues, lease agreements and other city funds could be used to build the garage.

"What that mix of revenues will be has yet to be determined," Mason said.

CRA members have shown interest in a garage that could house shops and restaurants as well as a police substation on the lower floors.

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