

Facade program boosts incentive City officials want attractive downtown

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If there is one thing city officials don't want in downtown Cape Coral it is impersonal-looking stores and offices.

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To help existing businesses renovate their buildings into more attractive ones, the Community Redevelopment Agency expanded its facade program to include projects that could cost up to \$1 million.

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"The whole idea is to encourage people to add architectural design and touches to their buildings that will make them more attractive," said Suzanne Kuehn, the agency's executive director.

"No one wants a bunch of boxes downtown."

Up until now, a business could get 15 percent of the money it spent on architectural improvements back — up to \$10,000. The new program with a project improvement agreement could get the business more money over time.

In the facade program, a businesses like B&D Interiors by Design, which owns a building that also houses Koogler Homes, made about \$200,000 in architectural improvements to the buildings, and could have taken \$10,000 up front.

B&D, which was the first business to take advantage of the new program, chose to take payments over time, which adds up to \$30,000.

The only catch is the \$30,000 would have to be taken over time from the redevelopment agency's trust fund as it collects property taxes. In the case of B&D Interiors, the agreement could net them about \$1,500 a year.

"We would have liked to get the entire 15 percent up front," said Joni Johnson, an owner of B&D Interiors by design. "(The program) doesn't work that way. It is still good for businesses that want to renovate and make the neighborhood look better."

Another developer, Isy Rogowski, said that it would be more prudent to take the cash in a lump sum now, rather than over time, even if it were less.

"Inflation and the market will eat up the money over time, I would recommend taking the \$10,000 at once," Rogowski said.

The choice is up to the developer, Kuehn said. They have to run the numbers for themselves.

"If they conclude that taking the \$10,000 works better if they invest the

money over 20 years, then they can take the \$10,000," Kuehn said. "It is up to them."

In any case the payout cannot exceed 15 percent of the money expended on architectural touches such as new stucco, new doors, masonry work, parking-lot improvements and other touches such as landscaping.

At the B&D Interiors building at 434 S.E. 47th Terrace, the entire facade renovated that it looks like a brand new building was built. There are Mediterranean-style touches such as towers and tiles.

"We put our heart and our money into improving the building," said Johnson, whose 31-year-old business has been in Cape Coral for 25 years. "If we ever sell it will be a good selling point."

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