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## Four Freedoms Park may be expanded Banks, ice cream store, Sunset Towers condos could be included

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While planners want Cape Coral's downtown to be a vibrant, walkable city environment — with restaurants, residences, theaters and offices — they also want it to be a walk in the park.

Plans call for enlarging Four Freedoms Park. The expansion could include razing Sunset Towers on Cape Coral Parkway, which has developed into an eyesore of postponed construction.

Four Freedoms Park encompasses 3.2 acres at 4818 Tarpon Court just off Cape Coral Parkway in the middle of the city's Community Redevelopment Area. The redevelopment area covers Cape Coral's downtown from Tudor Drive to

Bridge at the east. A section runs north along Del Prado Boulevard to Southeast 44th Street.

"If we got grants from the Florida Communities Trust we could expand the park," said Suzanne Kuehn, redevelopment area executive director. The trust, a state land-acquisition grant program, gives money to city governments to build parks for outdoor recreation.

The 2.5 acres occupied by Riverside Bank, SunTrust Bank and the Working Cow ice cream shop could provide additional space for picnic tables, paths and park benches in the park if they were demolished.

The Working Cow is already for sale, and both banks plan expansion not possible at their current location, Kuehn said.

The cost of expansion, availability of grants and other details have yet to be determined, she said. The idea to expand the park is in its infancy, with a lot of thought and work to be done before it happens.

A few Cape Coral residents at Origins Coffee Roastery, a couple blocks from the park on Cape Coral Parkway, favored the park expansion, with a touch of wistfulness.



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"Expanding the park sounds like a fine idea to me," said Helen Woods, 43. "But my 70-year-old mother likes the ice cream at the Working Cow."

That was the same sentiment from Rick Wilds, 71, whose grandson also loves the ice cream.

"I go there with my grandson," Wilds said. "The only problem with the park is the loud music at events."

It would also be an opportunity for the owners of the 56 condominiums in the Sunset Towers complex to bargain their way out of a continuing emotional and financial drain.

The Sunset Towers complex's two, eight-story buildings on Cape Coral Parkway have been in a state of disrepair ever since Hurricane Charley blew off the roof Aug. 13, 2004, causing massive water damage. Despite the residents' desires to return to their home, the date of completion continues to be postponed.

Asbestos found in the 36-year-old buildings slowed renovations. Construction cost increases meant a \$1.5 million loan. Bringing the building up to new city codes also slowed construction.

Trouble seemed never-ending. The troubles at the site continue.

The latest explanation for work suspension is that the homeowners group is waiting for a \$1 million check from the insurance company, said condominium association president Tony Lucibello, 61.

The redevelopment agency could consider buying the owners out and making the hulking structure into a park for the community. No one was optimistic about the possibility.

"The condominium owners, all of them, each and every individual, would have to agree to a sale," Kuehn said after calling a meeting with City Manager Terry Stewart about park expansion.

The city would not get involved in any Sunset Towers purchase unless all

"If they gave us \$25 million we would take it," Lucibello said.

A few Sunset Towers condominiums are for sale, listed at \$200,000 to \$299,999 depending on view.

The view is another reason to expand the park. The growth of the redevelopment area is planned to have buildings from four to 12 stories throughout the area.

"The views of the park would make any condominiums going in across the street more valuable," Wilds said. "I'd hate to see developers profit from the community's efforts."

One way the redevelopment agency has resolved that seeming discrepancy is to have a tree fund.

The tree fund allows developers to pay a fee rather than putting parks into

their project design. Fee schedules have to be adopted and would vary with the size of the development.

The fund goes into effect with the redevelopment agency's building codes. The codes, including zoning and land use, remain to be officially mapped.

"The developers would contribute to building parks," Kuehn said. "They would pay to have the park views."

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