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Iguana Mia reacts to paint rule

Owner wants to keep trademark green

By Denise L. Scott

dscott@news-press.com

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If Iguana Mia's bright green building can meet Cape Coral's exterior paint color rules, the rest of the downtown business owners don't have much to worry about.

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Architectural standards for exterior paint on downtown businesses must be complied with by July 1, 2009, according to the city's land use and development regulations. ADVERTISEMENT

Technically, the code does not dictate which colors can be used, except to prohibit fluorescent paint. It focuses, instead, on a color's light reflectance.

Iguana Mia owner Dirk Atherton, worried that his color may not pass muster, posted a sign in the lobby of his restaurant a few months ago to boost support for keeping the building's trademark bright green color.

Richard Orth, interim executive director of the Downtown Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency, compared sample colors to the green on the Iguana Mia building on Wednesday.

He said it appears the building will fall within acceptable standards, but he still must get a manufacturer's paint chip from Atherton for the official analysis.

But that's just a formality, he said.

"There's no question they're going to comply," Orth said, noting a shade darker than the building would also comply.

Atherton's not convinced yet. He is concerned that Orth compared the samples to paint on the building that has already faded in the sun.

"It's been exposed to sun and has lightened up," Atherton said. "It's not a huge difference. It loses a little bit of the pop."

He had Flex Bon Paints mix up a new can and color swatch on Wednesday and

was waiting for Orth to pick it up.

Louis Simmons, owner of Cape Dog Bakery and finalist for the open CRA board seat, said he doesn't know of any other downtown business owners opposed to the paint codes.

"We're supporters of it. I think it's positive for the downtown," he said.

However, he also considers Iguana Mia to be a downtown landmark.

"I think (Atherton's) jumping the gun," Simmons said about the lobby sign. "As far as I know, nobody's told him to change it."

Atherton said it's the principle of the matter.

"I opened the store in 1990 when there were no restrictions, no rules of color," he said.

Unlike someone who knows the rules in advance of buying in a deed-restricted community, Atherton was a long-time business owner when the paint codes were adopted.

"They're overlooking the basic property rights of people who've been there for years," he said.

He said the bright green color has always been important, helping customers find the restaurant when it first opened.

His general manager, Matt Lamb, said other businesses even mention it in their ads to help their customers find them.

Lamb said after hearing that some downtown business owners complained about the color at a CRA meeting, they decided to post the sign.

It asks patrons to "Rescue Cape Coral's history" and encourages supporters to contact their government officials.

The city code does have a process to apply for a deviation, but Atherton believes long-established businesses should automatically be exempted.

He said he'll take the lobby sign down when the CRA tells him — in writing — that his color is in compliance. But he'll still support any other business owners forced to make a change.

"If we've got to make this a political deal, then we will," Atherton said. "It's not just about me. It may happen to anybody."

Another downtown business owner who might be affected is Lois Murray, who opened the antique store Red Barn 12 years ago.

She said she forfeited the opportunity to receive a CRA matching grant to spruce

up her building back then because the executive director at the time told her red wasn't an option.

She said to meet requirements, she would have to tone it down to almost pink, and she refused.

"I've never had any facade money," she said. "At that time, they wanted lots of pastels. There are lots of reds in Mediterranean colors now."

This time, Murray plans to apply for a facade grant. She said she's willing to change the paint to a rusty red — if the original red doesn't meet the code and she's denied a deviation.

Despite her previous experience, Murray said she supports the CRA's efforts to revitalize downtown and encourages the agency and business owners to work together.

"My concern, more than painting, is just cleaning it up," she said. "To get our investors back, you've got to spruce up the area. ...We don't have a historical downtown. This is the closest we're ever going to come."

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