

Land-use changes proposed for downtown

From the heartland of strip malls, high-rise development soon could stretch to the sky.

Changes to Cape Coral's Comprehensive Land-Use Plan for the downtown Community Redevelopment Agency area will go before Cape Coral City Council during a special 5:05 p.m. meeting on Tuesday, Aug. 23. Council will be asked to approve amendments to the city's Future Land Use map to create a new downtown designation — Mixed Use Preserve District — allowing for a blend of residential and commercial throughout the CRA boundaries. If approved, the changes will be transmitted to the Department of Community Affairs for final approval.

The amendments are the precursor to the long-awaited development codes that will spell out allowable building setbacks and height and style requirements. Those will go before the Planning and Zoning Commission and council beginning next month.

The most significant change proposed is the number of residential units that would become allowable in the Cape's downtown. The proposal calls for an increase from 2,027 units to 11,146. A decrease in allowable commercial units is the tradeoff.

That tradeoff is just what CRA Executive Director Suzanne Kuehn wants to see occur — more downtown residents walking the streets at night spending money at the restaurants and shops that are already there and soon to follow. Residential units over commercial structures are the optimal mix that Kuehn craves.

“As it becomes easier to build outside of town, that's where developers go,” she said. “Unless they can bring their business in for ease of access and getting people to live downtown rather than drive in, they will ultimately suffer the fate of downtowns everywhere.”

For more on this local story by Kevin Duffy, see the Aug. 20 issue of **The Breeze**.

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