

Plan to rejuvenate downtown Cape Coral approved

Land use changes to give area more 'character.'

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Written by **Thomas Stewart**

A major rewrite of the land use and development regulations in south Cape Coral approved by City Council on Monday could help the downtown area create a sense of place similar to Key West or Fifth Avenue in Naples, according to those behind the effort.

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“You go to Key West not because there’s a beach there, but because it’s Key West,” said Cape Coral Community Redevelopment Agency executive director John Jacobsen. “That’s the kind of thing we want to develop, not just strip malls.”

The new codes encourage development that will make the 284 acres of the downtown CRA district affected by the changes more pedestrian-friendly, Jacobsen said.

“We’re looking for buildings that are brought closer to the sidewalk, buildings that are more downtown in character, that create walkability, pedestrian traffic, bicycle traffic, all those things that make you want to be in a place,” he said.

The regulations also remove a burdensome two-story requirement on new buildings, reduce parking and tree requirements and simplify the language by making it easier to read and moving the important elements to the top, he said.

And developers, he added, will not have to spend as much time pleading their case before committees and bending to the sometimes unpredictable requirements levied by those bodies.

“If (developers) simply follow the codes, boom, you can get a permit,” he said.

The new regulations have been in development for more than a year with help from Zyscovich Architects.

Council also decided on Monday to apply \$850,000 in revenue generated from residents’ recycling efforts to the general fund, as opposed to using it to lower the solid waste bill by about \$12 per resident.

In other news

- Councilman Lenny Nesta presented the Florida City Spirit Award to members of Take Pride in the Cape. The award was bestowed to the city by the Florida League of Cities as a result of the group’s beautification efforts.
- Council approved a \$45,000 contract for lobbying services with Becker & Poliakoff, P.A. for the 2013 legislative session.
- Council awarded a request for proposal to 1Pro Media for CapeTV production services for \$99,744.

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Mayor John Sullivan, along with Councilman Chris Chulakes-Leetz, disagreed with the vote, arguing residents deserve a lower rate.

"The residents have done a great job as far as recycling is concerned and I think we ought to give them some money back," Sullivan said.

But Councilman Kevin McGrail said the city is in dire need of money to pay for infrastructure projects such as road improvements and vehicle purchases, areas that have seen limited spending in recent years as a result of efforts to balance the budget.

"(The \$850,000) will be used for the maintenance and capital improvements, which have been ignored for the past four years," McGrail said.

Residents will, however, see their trash bill drop from \$161.35 to \$157.25, a reduction of \$4.10.

The decrease is a result of Council's decision to stop allowing residents to subsidize the commercial customers after legal issues were raised about the practice.

Businesses will now pay about \$70, up from \$66, according to finance director Vicki Bateman.

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