

Charlotte County update for 12/09/15

Redevelopment projects underway in CRAs

By Debrah Forester, Charlotte County redevelopment manager

Many of us enjoy watching home improvement shows – Property Brothers, Love It or List It are two of my favorites. Halfway through the show they typically discover rotten wood or unsafe wiring that brings the project to a halt. The contractor, the designer and the homeowner need to regroup, look at options, consider the budget and agree on a solution. At the end of 60 minutes, they solve the problem and everyone is happy with the reveal.

Consider remodeling a community. We are not just talking about one home – on one lot – we are talking about several individually owned parcels, each having their own history, plus underground public and private utility lines, which can be many, all located in a confined space. Redeveloping a community is challenging and requires patience, commitment and flexibility. Getting a project from idea, to design, to completion, can take years. But once completed, such a project can inspire new opportunities and new investment.

Redevelopment projects are underway in all three Charlotte County Community Redevelopment Areas. Dirt is moving, plans are being finalized and agreements are being negotiated. We are beginning to witness community visions becoming a reality. What an exciting time in Charlotte County.

First conceptualized in 2003, the Charlotte Harbor Gateway Harbor Walk project was identified in the Charlotte Harbor Community Redevelopment Plan to connect the east and west sides of U.S. 41, while enhancing access to the waterfront. Phase 1A is currently underway at the foot of the Barron Collier Bridge, with construction scheduled to be completed in March 2016. This phase includes a new seawall, bathrooms, a small-boat launch for kayaks, windsurfers and small sailboats, parking, landscaping, lighting and a sidewalk. This phase will provide a great walking trail from Chester Roberts Park on Melbourne Street to the lookout point of Harbor Walk. Or, you can continue your walk over the bridge to downtown Punta Gorda.

Phase 1B is the key to making the vision become a reality because it will provide an elevated boardwalk that will connect Phase 1A to the west side of U.S. 41 and allow users to continue to Bayshore Live Oak Park. The construction plans are complete and permit applications are under review by state and federal agencies. This phase also includes a new fishing pier, which is expected to be a welcome addition for both local and visiting anglers.

To help facilitate private investment along the waterfront, the county recently approved a change to the comprehensive plan in order to create the Riverwalk District in Charlotte Harbor CRA. This change allows for increased density and a mix of commercial uses. Land development code standards to facilitate the vision are currently being drafted.

Parkside

Parkside CRA just completed the first leg of the multi-Use trail plan with a 10-foot wide multi-use path along Elkcam Boulevard, from U.S. 41 to Midway. In addition to the trail, landscaping was installed. The shade trees planted along the multi-use path begin to illustrate the vision of the community – a walkable neighborhood connected to employment centers and commercial uses. Parkside, which is in the heart of Port Charlotte, contains all the elements that “new town” developments are striving to create on vacant parcels of land: mixed housing types, commercial uses, cultural amenities and an employment center. Four other projects (Harbor Boulevard, Gertrude/Aaron, West Tarpon/Ambrose and Olean) are currently under design and, when constructed, will complete approximately three miles of trails that will have an enormous impact on implementing the vision of Parkside. Plans for the revitalization of McGuire Park are also underway to make that a vibrant active space for the community to enjoy.

With the improved economy and housing demand growing in Southwest Florida, developers are looking to secure large tracks of land to meet their development needs. Murdock Village CRA is rising to the top of developers’ lists once again. The widening of U.S. 41 and the installation of utility lines adjacent to Murdock Village will provide the necessary infrastructure needed for the area to develop. Florida Department of Transportation is constructing three stormwater retention ponds required to expand the roadway. The county negotiated an agreement with FDOT to allow those ponds to be reconfigured if needed to meet the plans of future development.

Redevelopment is a team effort. It requires working across departments to plan and execute the community’s vision, while recognizing restrictions and challenges that may exist. For Charlotte County, the future for redevelopment opportunities is bright and 2016 should be another busy year.

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