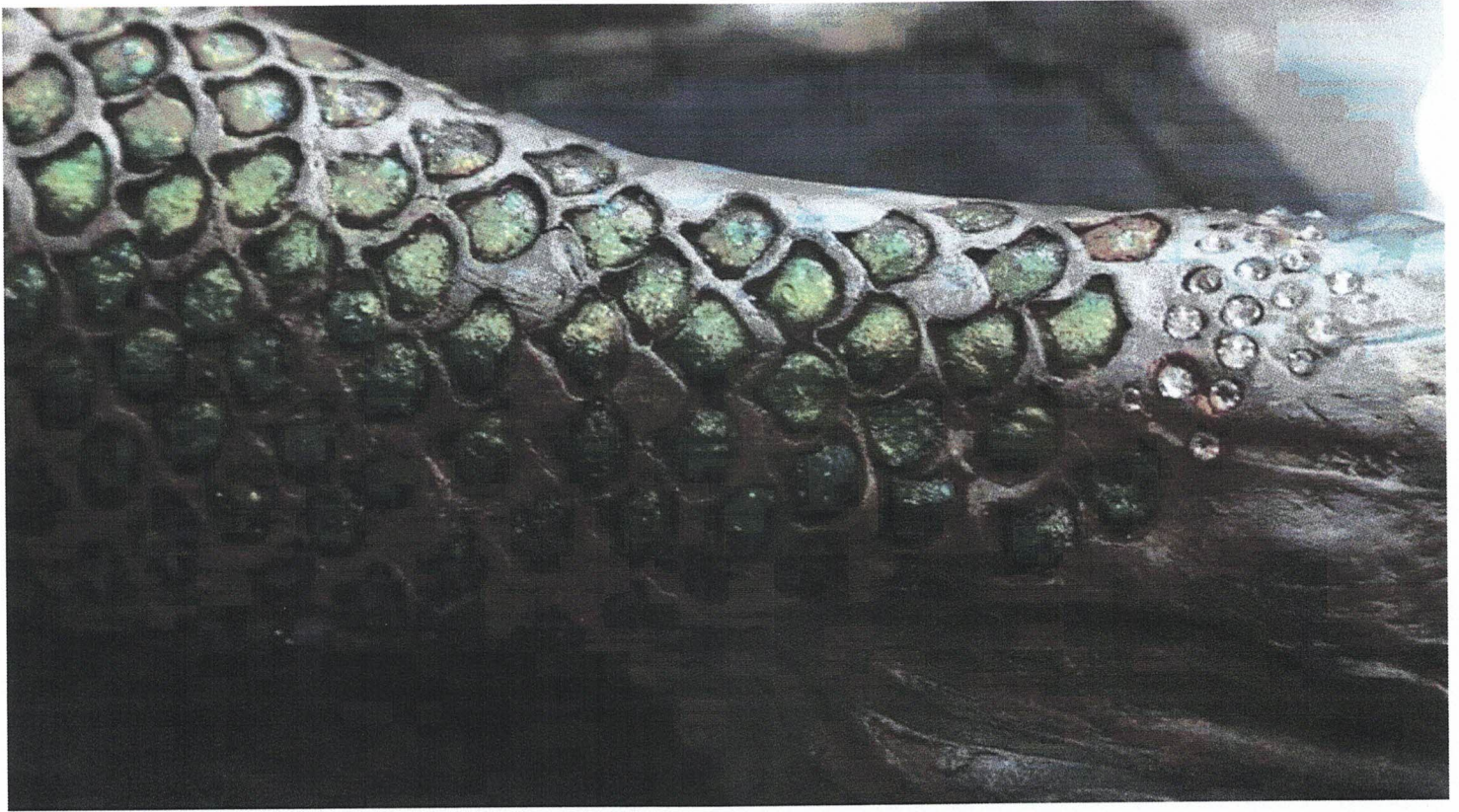


Coral Springs 'renaissance' starts with downtown plan



Coral Springs has its first specific plan in years for the future downtown.



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The first specific plan in years for the future downtown Coral Springs includes an eight-story apartment tower, hotel with a rooftop pool, grocery store and restaurants.

It even has a name: Coral Springs City Center.

This is the “start of the renaissance in the city,” said developer Rod Sheldon of Boca Raton-based PreDevCo.

The creation of a downtown has been the talk here for years and it’s been a struggle to find the right plan — and the developer who could pull it off. Both city administration and developers swear the project at the corner of Sample Road and University Drive is within months of final approval.

Previous plans — such as \$8 million worth of fountains at each of the corners where water would be timed to lights and music — were scrapped because of high costs. Ideas to make areas friendlier for pedestrians were stymied because of traffic congestion. The city paid a nonprofit for suggestions such as one to **turn canals into destination places**, like the famous San Antonio River Walk where tourists can raft with paddle boats alongside quaint outdoor cafes, but the idea never took off.

Although the Coral Springs City Center site plan hasn't yet been presented, the city administration has already informally signed off on the plan. And the Community Redevelopment Agency last week also gave its approval for a developer rebate as an incentive to build.

“We’ve been talking about it forever,” said Commissioner Dan Daley. “This [plan] is exactly what we’ve been talking about. It’s almost in a way vindication of the planning, time, money and effort the city has spent to make downtown Coral Springs a reality.”

Sheldon said **the city that was built for families in the 1960s** is ready to get daring.

He is expecting completion of the sale of a seven-acre site at the southwest corner of the intersection next month. Then his \$168 million project could soar as much as eight stories high. He plans a 450-room apartment tower where rents will peak at \$2,000 a month.

There are plans for an organic grocery store and half a dozen restaurants and bars. Large commercial space could house a gym or furniture store, Sheldon says.

There will also be an upscale 150-room hotel with its own parking garage that might have a rooftop pool. No hotel company has signed on to the property.

The 10-story office building now at the site, Coral Springs Financial Plaza, will come down.

“Our intent is to deliver to the city of Coral Springs a long overdue downtown gathering place,” Sheldon said. “There is nothing like this in Coral Springs. Young people and upscale empty nesters want to gravitate to that type of urban living and in this particular case it’s going to be smack in the middle of the downtown — a gathering place the city has been hankering for the last 25 years.”

Commissioner Larry Vignola said the development will “lead to other development because now things are starting to happen. [It will] encourage other developers to jump in.”

“I don’t want to see a downtown Fort Lauderdale in Coral Springs, I want to see something that fits Coral Springs — stroller-pushers in the morning, business people for lunch, a place to take my wife out to dinner,” he said. “This sets the tone for future development in the downtown area.”

Additional changes are in store for the downtown. On the southeast corner, city officials hope to move the Coral Springs Charter School and sell the land to a developer. To the north, the empty land once occupied by Publix is

for sale. To the west, the site of the current City Hall will also be sold to developers. The new City Hall, which will be next door to Coral Springs City Center, will open in February.

“When we put it together, we’re going to have a vibrant downtown,” said Mayor Skip Campbell.

Sheldon doesn’t think it’s risky to be first. “It’s only the beginning,” he said. “It’s called momentum.”

Planning ahead

The Coral Springs downtown project at University Drive and Sample Road includes:

A new city hall will open in February. The corner would include the new plans of a hotel with a maximum of eight stories, a grocery, restaurants, retail space, a residential tower of 450 rental apartments and parking garages. The 10-story office building there now, Coral Springs Financial Plaza, will be razed.

Southeast corner

That spot now has offices, the county library branch, and the Coral Springs Charter School. The city wants to relocate the charter school and sell that land for the downtown, **but has yet to find a new school site.**

Northwest corner

This area could become retail and residential. It is now home to the current city hall which will close in February. City officials said they are in talks with the landowners of the shopping plaza east of city hall, bordering University Drive, to sell their land, making it into one larger parcel to attract a developer. The site is also the **former location of a Broward College** satellite which closed after seeing an enrollment drop from about 1,000 students in 2015 to 649 in the spring of 2017.

Northeast corner

The first Publix in the city **closed at this site after Hurricane Wilma.** The land is currently for sale.

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