

.TRANSFORM PADRE LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

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Port Isabel-South Padre PRESS

President Calvin Coolidge may have best summed community and personal growth when he said “All growth depends upon activity. There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work.” Another American President, John Kennedy, said it this way, “Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth.”

Neither President was speaking about the growth of South Padre Island when they uttered those timeless words of wisdom, but both parables apply when it comes to a community – any community – laying aside the past to embrace the future. As someone else once said, “Change can be either good or bad, but it’s rarely easy.”

In the weeks ahead, thanks to a new redevelopment initiative, Island residents and interested visitors will get the opportunity to stand up and be heard. The topic involves redevelopment of the Island’s entertainment district using the principles of form-based code, a new and somewhat non-traditional method of controlling urban development designed to be sensitive to the needs of residents and visitors.

To better understand the principle of form-base code, it’s important to define exactly what that means to the average person. According to the New World Encyclopedia, form-based codes are a new response to the modern challenges of urban sprawl, deterioration of historic neighborhoods, and neglect of pedestrian safety in new development. Tradition has declined as a guide to development patterns, and the widespread adoption by cities of single-use zoning regulations has discouraged compact, walkable urbanism. Form-based codes are a tool to address these deficiencies, and to provide local governments the regulatory means to achieve positive development objectives with greater certainty.

It may sound rather academic, but in essence, form-base code represents the “new” initiative when deciding what types of zoning and development are best for those that live, work and play in a community. And ideally, form-base codes and redevelopment involves the input of all those that will be affected by the coming changes.

Island residents and interested individuals will get that chance June 9-16 when a series of open forums and planning sessions will be staged to help mold future development of the community’s entertainment district.

Jayashree Narayana plays the lead consulting role and is key to the design team on the project for Fort Worth’s Gateway Planning Group, the firm contracted to organize the Island’s redevelopment initiative. According to Narayana, this new initiative has nothing to do with the recent bond elections for improvements to Padre Boulevard, a common misconception.

“It’s unfortunate we could not stage this initiative prior to that election. While this initiative does call for many beautification standards, it is much broader and enlists the partnership from the private sector, a way to realize major growth and improvements without overtaxing and burdening the community’s ability to do the project alone,” she says.

As far as what the initiative may include in terms of Island development and changes to the entertainment district depends largely on the community’s input, she adds, saying that the upcoming planning sessions provide the perfect opportunity for residents to not only understand the project but to help “mold” it to fit the community’s needs.

According to a Gateway Web site dedicated to the project, the Town of South Padre Island is currently undertaking a redevelopment initiative to transform Padre Boulevard and the Entertainment District to better represent the needs of the community. Earlier this year, the Gateway Planning Team was engaged to create a master plan and form-based code to encourage redevelopment of both areas. The goal of the initiative is to establish a vibrant vision for the corridor and the Island's entertainment district as destinations in the community and the region.

In addition to encouraging sustainable economic development, this initiative will lead to streamlining development standards to implement the vision. Over the next days, the Design Team will engage the community in creating a vision plan and recommend implementation tools.

"The first step in creating this vision is the Community Design Workshop that has been scheduled from June 9 - 16," says Narayana. "Getting people involved is the key to success. This project has the support and involvement of the Texas Department of Transportation and there is ample interest on the part of the private sector. This, hopefully, is a formula for success."

The Gateway Planning Team has been on the ground since March and has presented its preliminary findings to a joint worksession of the Form-Based Code Commission and the Padre Boulevard Implementation Committee. The open workshops and community meetings represent the next step in the process.

The opening session for the redevelopment initiative is set for June 9, 5:30-8:30 p.m. On Monday, June 14, a public open house will be held beginning at 5 p.m. The closing session is scheduled for Wednesday, June 16, 5:30-7:30 p.m. In addition, the public is invited to the open design sessions scheduled June 10, 11, 14 and 15. These sessions will run from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. All meetings will be held at City Council Chambers at City Hall, 4601 Padre Blvd.

For more information about the project, visit the Web site at www.padreboulevard.com.