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Broward city leaders discuss downtown redevelopment at Breaking Ground event

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Leaders with four Broward County cities discussed their efforts to spur development in downtown urban districts July 24 at the Breaking Ground with Brian Bandell real estate panel.

With few vacant sites remaining for development in Broward, the future of growth lies mostly in infill development. Residents are moving into both traditional downtown on the east side of the county, and emerging urban, mixed-use districts out west.

The panel, sponsored by the Greater Fort Lauderdale Chamber of Commerce and Cambria USA, was held at the NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. The audience heard Jorge Camejo, executive director of the Hollywood Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA); Danielle Cohen Lima, CRA administrator for Coral Springs; Jenni Morejon, president and CEO of the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority; and Michael Ryan, mayor of Sunrise, discuss the push for urban development in their respective cities.

Here are three takeaways from the panel:

Visions of growth



JOCK FISTICK / SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

The four cities are in different stages of growth, with Fort Lauderdale in the midst of a development boom that's decades in the making, and Coral Springs just putting its downtown plans into place.

Fort Lauderdale's form-based code allows developers great flexibility in uses and relatively easy-to-understand density allowances, Morejon said. Thousands of residential units and hundreds of hotel rooms are under construction, and many more are planned. Two office buildings are also in the pipeline.

While the rules on the books in downtown Fort Lauderdale encourage development, the newly elected leadership is less inclined to support development than the previous city commission, Morejon said. Many residents want to make sure that the level and services and infrastructure exists to support the city's growth, she said.

Hollywood rezoned a large area centered on Young Circle as a regional activity center (RAC), where mixed uses are permitted and density is greater – with up to 16,000 residential units. It also has complete streets designed for cars, public transit and to encourage pedestrians, Camejo said. The Hollywood Circle hotel, apartments and retail building is the first major project in that initiative.

The Hollywood CRA has also sponsored murals and outdoor arts venues to attract visitors to downtown, which already has many restaurants, Camejo said. One of the greatest challenges is that many buildings there are historic, so the ability to redevelop them is limited.

"You have to have development in our coastal communities, otherwise you just continue the urban sprawl," Camejo said.

Sunrise is well known for the Sawgrass Mills mall, BB&T Center and Sawgrass International Corporate Park, and now it wants an urban center to tie everything together, Ryan said. The 65-acre Metropica mixed-use project, and another project to follow by Stiles Corp. should create a synergistic area where people can live, work and shop, he said.

Coral Springs is known as a bedroom community, but it has been working to create a downtown around University Drive and Sample Road, Cohen Lima said. In February, the city approved a 136-acre local activity center that permits mixed-use

development up to 2,500 residential units, 2 million square feet of offices, and 1 million square feet of retail. After buying an old office building, Boca Raton-based PreDevCo has proposed Cornerstone as the first project under this new zoning.

Coral Springs built a municipal parking garage with 250 spaces of excess capacity to encourage development around it, and is spending \$5 million to add water and sewer lines to support more density, Cohen Lima added.

Potential for redevelopment

Each of the four cities had properties that municipal officials would like to see redeveloped.

Hollywood is working on plans for University Station, a 4-acre, city-owned parcel at the corner of Fillmore Street and 21st Avenue, Camejo said. It's a possible rail station if passenger service is added to the FEC line, he added. The city might issue a request for proposals (RFP) for development on the site later this year, Camejo said.

Hollywood would also like to see a former Publix building on east side of Young Circle, near U.S. 1, redeveloped into mixed uses with a better connection to Hollywood Boulevard, Camejo said. The city is in talks with owner Regency Centers about the possibilities there.

Fort Lauderdale and Broward County are working on a plan to build a joint government center on the "mobility hub" site – currently a bus depot – near the Brightline passenger rail station, Morejon said. Not only could that create a public-private partnership opportunity on the 16-acre site, but it could open up the sites of existing city and county buildings for redevelopment, she said.

Now that Coral Springs has completed a new municipal center, the 4-acre site of its former city hall has been cleared and is ready for development, Cohen Lima said. The city is negotiating with a handful of private property owners to buy an adjacent 7 acres to enlarge the development site, and it's seeking a private partner to redevelop the whole site, she said.

Coral Springs also has a 1.5-acre site near its new municipal parking garage available for development, and PreDevCo is in negotiations to build the hotel for its

neighboring Cornerstone project, Cohen Lima said.

Ryan said Sunrise is in no rush to sell its city-owned land near Sawgrass Mills, but it is participating in the county's plans to redevelop the parking lots around the BB&T Center. The city has also encouraged owners of struggling retail centers to redevelop them with residential, in addition to shops, he added.

Incentives from cities

These four cities have programs designed to encourage development and employment in their urban centers.

Tax increment financing (TIF) – where developers save on future property taxes based on the value of a completed project – is offered through the CRAs of Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood and Coral Springs. The CRAs also have property improvement grants for landlords in certain areas that want to improve their buildings, such as adding electrical wiring for a sign. This program cannot be used to correct code violations, Camejo added.

While Sunrise doesn't have a CRA, the city has used its bonding capacity to help both Sawgrass Mills and Metropica build parking garages, Ryan said. It has also awarded job growth incentives to companies. The city awarded TIF to American Express for a major employment center.

"We will provide incentives for big employers that would justify big development around them," Ryan said.

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