

City of Cape Coral taking care of business

Officials make it easier to get things done

What a difference a change in leadership can bring.

There is a new marshal in Cape Coral taking care of business and his name is King — Gary King, Cape Coral city manager.

Ever since I moved to Southwest Florida in 1981, it seemed Cape Coral had a reputation for being a painful place to do business. Nothing came easy for owners of commercial real estate.

I recall a client of mine trying to modify her existing medical office space on Del Prado Boulevard during the late 1990s. It took Cape Coral code more than six months to approve her modification plan for 2,000 square feet before she could even start construction. It took a total of 10 months to complete her simple modification project from the date plans were first submitted to code.

There appeared to be disregard for the interests of local business back then. Well that was then and this is now.

Cape Coral has made an about face and now appears to be an



easier place to do business. The city's leadership is making sure of that.

Audie Lewis, the city's business development specialist, regularly attends our monthly CCIM (Certified Commercial Investment Member) monthly marketing sessions. He invited members to call him if we have any clients in need of assistance in Cape Coral.

This all sounded nice, but I was still skeptical, having witnessed almost three decades of something quite different in Cape Coral. So I decided to put them to the test.

A client from Ontario, Canada, visited Southwest Florida in December and asked me about Cape Coral commercial opportunities. We arranged to meet at a local coffee shop to discuss a few alternatives.

As I was driving over the south bridge, I called Audie Lewis only to get his voice mail. Undeterred,

I called the city manager's office and asked for Gary King. His office assistant said he was away, but said she would track him down if I could hold. I said yes, thinking to myself, "Sure, this is going to happen."

But to my surprise, a few moments later, King came on the line and asked if he could help.

I explained who my client was and his business plans. King said, "Just come right over. I will track Audie down and make sure we take care of you and your client."

I hung up staring quizzically into my cell phone, thinking this sort of thing only happened in movies.

We arrived at City Hall in 20 minutes and Gary King quickly ushered us into a private conference room. Audie Lewis was there waiting with every conceivable map and business study on Cape Coral. King stayed in our meeting as Audie gave a great presentation, and then Audie answered every question my client posed.

As a commercial real estate broker, this is the type of government service that one might dream about but never really

expect to experience. They made it so easy for me that I was almost embarrassed. Audie offered to meet my client at different locations around the Cape to show him opportunities that he knew about.

I left the meeting with a new perspective on what is possible in Cape Coral.

My client was surprised as well. He confided as we walked to the car that he had never experienced a government agency so willing to help him do business in Canada.

His decades of experience working with different city agencies in Canada for new and redevelopment projects had always been a long painful process. I decided not to mention that his experience sounded all too familiar.

Brokers in Southwest Florida should take notice. Cape Coral is business friendly.

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