

LOCAL

## Naples City Council to discuss controversial code changes for residential construction



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Residents and builders are sounding alarms about potential changes to construction rules for homes in Naples.

City Council will discuss adjustments to the land development code Monday aimed at protecting the charm and character of Naples.

They'll talk about whether to put more limits on lot coverage and building area and to require more landscaping.

The potential changes are directed at single- and two-family residential lots.

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While city leaders insist the modifications they're considering are well-intentioned, residents and the building industry fear they could do more harm than good, hurting property values and hampering recovery efforts from Hurricane Ian.

The land use changes have been a priority for City Council for two years.

"I expect some clarification to take place on Monday, with regard to their intent. I can't speak for Council," said Jay Boodheshwar, city manager.

He encouraged anyone with concerns or feedback to attend the meeting so they can have input in the discussions.

Critics question why city leaders would want to move potential code changes back to the front burner now, with so many property owners focused on recovery from Hurricane Ian and not paying attention to Council discussions.

"Why are we rushing into this, immediately after Ian took place?" asked Kathy Curatolo, a consulting legislative liaison for the Collier Building Industry Association.

The ramifications of what's under consideration are unclear.

"Any time you have new rules that are implemented, particularly if they are implemented immediately, it causes confusion, and that is a double whammy, given the effects of Hurricane Ian in the city of Naples," Curatolo said.

While City Council could take action, deciding on next steps at the meeting, Boodheshwar said there is actually nothing formal for them to vote on.

"It's to brainstorm," he said. "It's to throw out ideas."

Ultimately, City Council could decide to have a workshop on the matter, sometime down the road, Boodheshwar said.

If they do, Curatolo said she hopes Council will consider that the city has various zoning districts, so a "one-size-for-all" approach is not appropriate.

At recent meetings, city leaders have expressed concerns that Ian could attract the wrong kind of redevelopment, drawing in investors who want to maximize their profits by building bigger, not necessarily better — and not in keeping with the city's vision.

Priorities in the city's vision plan include protecting and enhancing the natural environment and preserving the small town feel of Naples.

A public notice about Monday's agenda emphasized that City Council will not take up an even more controversial "zoning in progress" resolution.

Council discussed such a resolution at its Oct. 19 meeting, with little notice, drawing ire.

Ultimately, it was deferred indefinitely, by a unanimous vote.

Residents, builders and architects argued it would cause too much uncertainty in the residential building process — including for Ian survivors trying to put their homes and lives back together.

The purpose of the declaration is to prohibit or discourage development that will not conform to proposed changes such as those Council will discuss Monday.

After hearing so many complaints and concerns, Councilman Ted Blankenship made the motion to defer the resolution.

"We may not need this," Blankenship said. "We may cancel it. We may decide based on public input we do need something. We just don't know yet."

Some opponents likened the declaration to a building moratorium.

"I'm going to say that any kind of a building moratorium at this point in time would be devastating," Curatolo said. "So let's just throw it out. Let's not even defer it indefinitely."