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# Charlotte Sun



THURSDAY AUGUST 17, 2006

VOL. 114 NO. 229

AN EDITION OF THE SUN

America's Best Community Daily

www.sun-herald.com

50 CENTS

## Punta Gorda previews county's plan for new events center

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STAFF WRITER

**PUNTA GORDA** — The City Council learned what Charlotte County has planned for the events center in downtown Wednesday.

Harvard Jolly architect Ward J. Friszolowski described the project as challenging, especially trying to keep within the county's \$16.5 million budget. But Friszolowski believes that the multi-use center will serve the community well.

The 45,000-square-foot center will be large enough for an exhibition with 110 booths or a formal dinner seating 800 to 900 people. The building will also include four "breakout rooms" for meetings. The events center will replace the Charlotte County Memorial Auditorium that

was destroyed by Hurricane Charley on Aug. 13, 2004.

Unlike the auditorium, which had the northern portion of the property devoted to parking fronting on the Peace River, the new design calls for a "great lawn," nearly the size of a football field. The building will be located on the center of the property, with large glass fronting on the river to take advantage of the river view.

The southern portion of the property will be devoted to parking, and Friszolowski said it will be engineered to allow for the construction of a parking garage. He did suggest to council members they could expect to pay \$20,000 per parking space.

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ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED

This computer-generated illustration is designed to show the breakup of the "mass" of Charlotte County's planned events center and not the architectural design. The exterior of the building will reflect a mission style of architecture.

### ★ CENTER

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When it came to the architectural style of the building, Team Punta Gorda, a grass-roots group that developed the Citizens 2005 Master Plan, questioned the proposed design of the project.

"The design of this economically and aesthetically crucial events center is reminiscent of its industrial-style predecessor and completely disregards the personality of its environ-

ment," Team Punta Gorda stated in a press release Wednesday. "We believe this unimaginative design detracts from the obvious efforts of our downtown businesses to rebuild with a consistency in visual spirit."

Roger Kress, of Team Punta Gorda, reiterated his group's concerns Wednesday. He suggested the county and city were ignoring city land-use and architectural requirements that are imposed on private property owners. "The concern I have is a big

square building in one of the most important pieces of property in downtown," Kress said. "Saying this will be in mission style is like saying a covered wagon is a Lamborghini."

Councilman Tom Poole defended the design. "The important thing is what's inside," Poole said. "When you have a big hollow box for people to be doing things, it's very difficult to make the outside the Eiffel Tower."

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