

Topic: Media
Subject: Bradenton Herald: Sarasota CRA expanded to include Newtown
Author: Brette Peeples
Date/Time: 09/25/2007 12:16PM

SARASOTA --

It took more than a decade, but the historic Newtown community in Sarasota officially became part of the city's downtown redevelopment taxing district Monday.

The new designation will allow the historically black neighborhood to become eligible to receive more than \$20 million in revitalization funding.

During a joint meeting of the city and county commissions, the two boards unanimously voted to expand the existing boundaries of the city's Community Redevelopment Area and pump an additional \$16.9 million into the neighborhood's housing projects.

Dressed in a bright purple jacket and a yellow shirt in honor of Booker High School in Newtown, Sarasota Mayor Lou Ann Palmer thanked dozens of residents attending the meeting for patiently waiting for the city and county governments to get on the same page.

"I don't want to say, 'Happy Birthday,' " Palmer told the Newtown residents. "But it is the birth of a new day."

County Commission Chair Nora Patterson said the inclusion of Newtown in the city's CRA is long overdue.

"This journey actually started in the early 1990s," Patterson said, as City Commissioner Fredd "Glossie" Atkins insisted it has taken even longer.

The problem the county faced was many other areas in Sarasota County also wanted to create their own CRA districts to become eligible for tax increment financing for economically depressed areas, she said.

"The city of Venice would like a CRA," Patterson said. "The city of North Port would like a CRA. And this is basically the second CRA in the city of Sarasota."

But almost 20 years ago, Patterson said the residents of Sarasota County recognized the importance of downtown Sarasota and agreed to invest millions of dollars into the restoration of Main Street and the surrounding business district.

County Commissioner Jon Thaxton also applauded the Housing Authority's plan to use \$16.9 million from the city's housing fund, federal grants, surtaxes and tax increment funds to develop approximately 850 affordable housing units in the Newtown area.

These new units will accept residents of all income levels and will not force the existing residents from the Newtown area.

"In order to move up, you don't have to move out," Thaxton said. "You never have to leave the community you came up in."