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PCB unveils road upgrade plans

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PANAMA CITY BEACH — Panama City Beach residents caught a glimpse of what their drive home could look like in about 10 years at a public meeting Tuesday.

During the meeting, the city's Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) presented plans for

upcoming roadway improvement projects on State 79 and a nearby portion of Front Beach Road.

CRA Director John Alaghemand said the agency's No. 1 goal is to help make the beach more bicycle and pedestrian-friendly, with plans to add sidewalks and bike lanes in the project areas.

The State 79 redevelopment area spans about a half mile from Front Beach Road to just north of

Back Beach Road. Improvements include expanding the road from two lanes to a four-lane divided roadway with bicycle lanes, a raised median with turn lanes and sidewalks on each side.

The project also includes improvements on a nearby stretch of Front Beach Road starting just west of State 79 and continuing about a half mile east to Lullwater Lake. The Front Beach Road seg-

ment will be widened to include one traffic lane, one bike lane and sidewalks in each direction separated by a raised median.

Major land acquisition efforts will stem from a proposed stormwater treatment pond at the east corner of the State 79 and Front Beach Road intersection, currently the site of Muy Wayne's

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Mexican Restaurant.

The project also would transform what has become known as the "Y" at the intersection and convert it into a normal "T" intersection, which would require acquisition of the Chevron gas station property.

"We've been coordinating with the property owners from the very beginning," Alaghemand said. "It wasn't a surprise."

Once public comment is gathered, the CRA will work to make any changes to the design package to be submitted to the Florida Department of Transportation, which then

will be responsible for managing and prioritizing the project.

No funding currently is available for the project, which might not begin for another five to 10 years.

Paige and Dub Hill own property in the proposed redevelopment area on Front Beach Road and said the project would bring much-needed aesthetic improvements to the area.

"We wish they'd hurry up and start it next week," Dub Hill said. "It will be a great improvement to the beach."

The CRA was formed in 2001

and is driven by tax increment funding, a method of using future gains in property taxes to subsidize infrastructure improvements, which are anticipated to drive those gains.

So far, the agency has completed roadway improvements on South Thomas Drive, Front Beach Road from South Thomas Drive to Hutchison Boulevard and several roadways that connect Front and Back Beach roads, including Richard Jackson Boulevard, Churchwell Drive and the first segment of Powell Adams Road.