

# A Smart Vision, Investment For Temple Terrace's Future

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Temple Terrace voters are being asked to raise their property taxes by 1 mill to help finance a major downtown redevelopment. The project is visionary, but it is based on economic realities the city must confront.

For several years the city has been developing a plan to create a downtown out of a blighted, sprawling shopping center at the crossroads of its business district. The city had no desire to go into the real estate business, but after years of watching Temple Terrace's prospects languish, elected leaders chose to take charge.

Early voting began July 8 and the citywide referendum is set for Aug. 2. The increase would cost the owners of a home assessed at \$150,000 about \$125 a year.

Temple Terrace leaders have been conservative in their redevelopment efforts and have pursued this project in a manner that has drawn accolades from urban planners nationwide. The city amassed properties in the blighted areas. It involved the public in the development of a downtown vision, and it consulted with national experts throughout the process.

The city anticipates it may spend \$60 million over the next 10 years to build new streets, sewers, drainage systems and parking garages that will make the new downtown possible. That's a lot of money. But if residents do not act, it is likely to cost them far more as property values are stifled, businesses are lost and urban decay causes crime and other social problems.

The tax increase will be seed money for turning this blighted swath of land into a lively downtown, which will include a new city hall and several parks. It is the proper function of government to pay for such expenses. No public money will be spent for the construction of homes or businesses.

The city does not take a tax increase lightly, nor should it. In 2000, Temple Terrace voters approved a half-mill increase that was used in part to fund the early stages of redevelopment. Before that, the last tax increase was in 1990. Pro-redevelopment candidates have consistently won city elections.

Voters have had multiple chances to chart the city's course and have consistently pointed the way to redevelopment. To abandon the effort now would halt any hope of revival and drive away developers who are moving to invest in Temple Terrace now because they see signs of progress.

This said, it's also important for city leaders to be cautious as they proceed. They should let the market, not their ambitions, determine the project's ultimate size.

By taking such a bold step, Temple Terrace will be making an important statement for other Florida cities. Massive strip shopping centers may have seemed a good idea in their heyday, but across the state they are dying and dragging down neighborhoods with them.

While the state suffers from the effects of urban sprawl and more of Florida's green space is paved over to create something new, city dwellers need to have the courage and foresight to remake their communities.