

Downtown: Sweetbay dealing, others may move

By Debbie Carson, Staff Write

TEMPLE TERRACE — Pinnacle/Ram is still working on the Sweetbay Supermarket proposal, which is the “most pivotal” for the project. City Councilman Ron Govin did not elaborate further on the deal with Sweetbay at the recent Temple Terrace Town Hall meeting. One of the few remaining tenants, Sweetbay is by far the largest and has a lease deal that can run for decades.

Pinnacle/Ram has struck an agreement with Regions Bank to move the financial institution elsewhere within the project. Preliminary site plans have shown the possibility of Regions – or another bank – moving to where the current Burger King is at the corner of N. 56th Street and Bullard Parkway.

The developer is also still talking with Burger King to try to move the fast food restaurant off the corner and farther east along Bullard.

“For the first time, I feel like maybe this can happen,” Govin said, noting that prior meetings between city staff and Pinnacle/Ram have had several negative points and finally everything is positive.

“Things that weren’t happening before are happening,” the councilman said.

Two big issues came up at last week’s Town Hall meeting – property tax reform and the city’s downtown redevelopment project.

For results of Tuesday’s vote on Amendment One, check The Beacon’s Web site, www.cnewspubs.com/beacon.

Slow and steady might, after all, win the race when it comes to Temple Terrace’s downtown redevelopment project after seven years.

At least, that’s the message from City Hall.

“We truly have a lot of good news,” Councilman Ron Govin said. Govin has been serving as the council’s point man in the negotiations and planning processes with Pinnacle/Ram, the city’s selected development team.

The city’s staff has entered the “final” negotiations with Pinnacle/Ram, Govin said, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t a “heck of a lot to do.”

The two sides have a to-do list 28 items long that must be completed prior to the closing date in July.

“We have a very active developer,” Govin told the audience and his fellow council members. They hope to have the first draft of the final site plan ready for the council’s approval at the Feb. 5 council meeting.

Pinnacle/Ram’s leasing team has also been running hard, working to “finalize” several leases. “I can’t reveal anything to you,” Govin said, addressing the crowd, “without shooting you.” His comment sparked a soft chuckle from the audience.

During the town hall meeting, the city council took the opportunity to explain to the audience how Amendment One – the property tax reform – ballot item could impact the city’s services and the city’s residents.

While the council did not ask its residents to vote one way or the other on the issue, it was clear that they believe the amendment could ultimately result in decreased city services.

According to the city's math, if the property tax issue passes, Temple Terrace could expect to lose at least \$600,000 from its budget – after already cutting \$500,000 from the first roll-back.

To put the figure in perspective, Councilman Mark Knapp told the audience that just to keep up with the city's payroll – and not adding new staff – it costs \$600,000.

"Something has to give," he said.

The city recognized that there are some benefits to Amendment One – though not much incentive for governments.

The city handed out a piece of paper with two headings: Issues of Support and Issues of Concern.

Some of the items under the Support category include:

- Buyers wishing to "downsize" their home can still use Save Our Homes.
- Keeps government spending in check.
- Potential for \$240 savings is better than nothing for some people.
- Tax cuts stimulate the economy.

The Concerns category is longer and includes:

- It was put together so quickly that there are likely unintended consequences.
- Fiscal impact unknown.
- No guaranteed benefit to renters and businesses, who also need relief.
- No guarantee that tax rates won't go up to offset lost income.

This point was brought up during the town hall meeting when one resident asked if Temple Terrace would increase its millage rate to make up for the lost funds.

Mayor Joe Affronti responded by saying that the city has no plans to raise the millage but if revenues decreased to the point where the city might have to cut vital – police and fire – services, the city would "earnestly consider" what it could do to maintain those services.