

Beat up' gas station takes a beating for redevelopment

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The long-closed Chevron gas station at the corner of 56th Street and Chicago Avenue has taken a beating - literally.

Armed with hardhats and sledgehammers residents and city leaders knocked bricks out of the corner of the former gas station. With each resounding pound, bricks and dust flew through the air. Residents cheered.

It wasn't exactly a groundbreaking ceremony but the intent was the same. Now that the city has named a another developer to create a new downtown, city leaders want to get started on their downtown dream.

"We did not want to wait," said Mayor Joe Affronti in his speech to the audience. He said that while some have asked that the city hold off until the November election, the majority of the City Council wanted to move forward.

Scott "Skipper" Peek Jr., of the Pinnacle/Ram development team, told the group that his firm is excited about being selected and is very confident that its plan for the downtown project is grounded in reality.

And while demolishing the Chevron gas station is a symbolic gesture of the start, "there's a great deal of work to go," Peek said.

After a short round of opening speeches, Affronti donned a white hardhat, grabbed a gilded sledgehammer and took a whack at the gas station, sending debris flying.

"This is a chance to take out your frustra-



Councilman Frank Chellura swings the golden sledge hammer as he among others took a chunk out of the wall of the Chevron Gas Station Oct. 18 to symbolize the start of the redevelopment process. Staff photo by Keith Carson.

tions," said city spokesman Michael Dunn, addressing the audience.

After Affronti pounded on the building, the members of the City Council lined up, ready to take a chunk out of the building.

"We may not need a bulldozer when this is done," Dunn said as nearly a dozen people lined up to take a swing at the bricks and mortar.

The TBE Group will be in charge of fully demolishing the site, clearing it to make way for the downtown development project.

After everyone took their shots at the building, residents began to disperse, some taking chunks of the building with them as souvenirs.

Grant Rimbey, a Temple Terrace resident and supporter of the redevelopment project, grabbed a large chunk of wall to take home. He so thoroughly pounded the wall that some wondered if there would be anything left for others waiting in line.

He said that he was motivated to strike the wall and had worked on construction sites in the past, which led to his powerful pounding.

Pinnacle/Ram was selected at a special council meeting on Oct. 12. Council members said their local ties to the community and their detailed plan for the downtown site were key components for why city leaders selected them.

Peek, who represents the firms, is a Temple Terrace area resident and attends a church in the city. He also coaches a local football team that includes Affronti's grandson.

The developer plans to establish a grid system of roads in the downtown area - starting in the southeast quadrant of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway and heading south to the Hillsborough River.

The grid system would create blocks to develop on, allowing for flexibility in the project, Peek told the council during the firm's presentation earlier in the month.

By creating blocks, the developer can make changes to the plan without having to redraw it from scratch. The project would also be able to be modified to better come in line with market pressures - such as resi-

dential and commercial needs.

Just before the pounding of the Chevron station, Peek told the audience that his firm has already started on tweaking the plan and working with the city.

"So far, so good," he said.