

Mayor's message: Don't believe those who say, 'The sky is falling'

Editor:

The "Letters to the Editor" that recently have appeared in local publications (Oct. 25) from Mr. Rendahl, Mr. Tozier, Mr. Rice and Mr. Siegel have inspired me to respond to their "sky is falling" mentality.

They continue to spread misinformation about the costs associated with our redevelopment efforts. Here is the truth: The vast majority of costs will be borne by the developer. The developer will purchase most of the property the City has acquired for the new town center. The City will keep some for parks and cultural/civic components.

The "back door" \$13-million loan referenced by Mr. Rendahl and seconded by Mr. Tozier came from a U.S. Housing and Urban Development award that includes a \$1.5 million grant and a low-interest \$13-million loan. It has not been "instigated" but is available to our City if and when we determine it should be utilized and paid for from our TIF (tax increment financing) funds, NOT from new taxes. Our elected officials have promised "No New Taxes" for redevelopment.

We expect to accrue tens of millions of dollars in TIF money in the coming years as development proceeds. Additionally, we have been awarded more than \$19 million in federal, state and county grants, low-interest loans and other funding for our share of the project, which is enthusiastically supported by our government partners. Moreover, as the development progresses, it will increase the City's tax base, further reducing the burden on homeowners.

We promise you this: We absolutely will not proceed with redevelopment without a concrete feasibility analysis. But don't you need a plan first, so that you know what you're assessing?

Mr. Tozier has consistently talked about our City "squandering funds," but he fails to mention the City has spent more than

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\$200,000 in legal fees to defend against his lawsuits.

Mr. Tozier wrote that the City Council "attempted to give away a million-dollar asset" without regard for residents (a property he offered to buy from the City for \$450,000 in February). Actually, the Council offered to give five of nine acres for construction of a new Terrace Community Middle School, a school that is recognized as one of the best charter schools in the country. In short, we tried to answer Mr. Rendahl's question, when he wrote: "Don't all of our children deserve the best education we can afford?"

I suggest that Mr. Rendahl visit Temple Terrace Elementary School, where he will see the most modern equipment available. Our City awards \$15,000 in grants annually to our schools to enhance education and provides youth swim teams, volleyball teams and golf teams access to our recreational facilities.

We also meet with our City's school principals every six weeks, and we are developing goals that will provide our children with the best education possible.

As for City services, we are constantly upgrading equipment and adding necessary personnel. We have added four new police officers and strengthened the Code Compliance Department. Our Fire Department is internationally accredited. Our rails-to-trails project is slated for the 2008/2009 budget, and plans for a major renovation of the Lightfoot Recreation Center are now being prepared.

I realize that my letter is not "politically correct," but I owe it to our citizens to lay out the facts so that they do not have to rely on misinformation.

Those who say "the sky is falling" see only darkness. But for the rest of us, the City's future has never looked brighter.

Joe Affroni
Mayor of Temple Terrace

'Our Council members have done their homework and we have a viable plan'
Editor:

Who do you trust?

Recent Letters to the Editor have made some astounding assertions regarding the financial feasibility of the Temple Terrace Downtown Revitalization project, but none of them have backed up the unsubstantiated claims with any evidence whatsoever. Anyone can write a Letter to the Editor and make just about any claim. Our elected officials MUST tell the truth or face legal repercussions! It is interesting that these "armchair financial analysts" somehow know more than our Finance Director, City Manager, Community Services Director, Mayor, and entire City Council, not to mention the groups of trained professionals hired by the City. Do you really think our entire City government is infested with crooks and criminals who only want to bamboozle us?

There are those who think we should take the quick, cheap way out by just selling the land to a developer and giving free reign. Both Mr. Knapp and Mr. Tozier have stated they favor this approach. If your vision of a vibrant Downtown is another strip center with Big Lots and Pawn shops, these are your candidates. Our Council members have done their homework and we have a viable plan in place to produce an award winning vision of a Downtown with a sense of place, not just another stop along the way. The Developer is purchasing the bulk of the land, taking the City out of the "real estate business." The City will retain control of the streets, parks, and possibly the parking garage. Several millions of dollars in grants have been procured to offset the cost to the City for these items, which would be lost if the revitalization plan is not followed. Hillsborough County has an agreement with Temple Terrace (TTF) to

keep its portion of property taxes in the redevelopment area fixed at the 2004 level for the next 10 years with the City receiving 100 percent of any increased property tax revenue through development, and 80 percent of that increased revenue for the following 20 years. These tax rebates from Hillsborough County for developing this area would flow directly back to Temple Terrace, with the caveat that this money MUST stay in the Redevelopment area. This is, in simple terms, how this development can proceed without burdening the taxpayer. If you have any questions, do not look to Letters to the Editor for answers. Contact your representatives for full, knowledgeable and truthful answers. One of the best treasures we have in Temple Terrace is our "sense of community." Vote for something of which we can all be proud.

David M. Long
Temple Terrace

Shattles is 'level-headed, business-like and she always puts the City first'

I have known Linda Shattles for over 30 years. In that time I have never known her to be anything other than level-headed, business-like and she always puts the City first. I have worked with her in the Temple Terrace Woman's Club, attended church with her at Temple Terrace United Methodist Church and served with her on various committees. Never have I seen anything but a calm and serene demeanor. We could not have a better choice for City Council.

Jo Ivey
Temple Terrace