

City to decide on new, 'final' redevelopment site plan

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Arts center makes comeback, riverfront homes axed

By Debbie Carson, Staff Writer

Arts Center or no? Two banks or just one? Burger King on the corner or pushed aside? The Temple Terrace City Council has a tremendous number of questions to ponder when choosing among six new site plans.

That's right. What the council thought it approved in March as its site plan has changed – again.

The council is expected to make the final selection at the next meeting, on Nov. 20.

After the council agreed that it should not have an Arts Education Center, and subsequently the parking garage next door to support it, the development team had to go back to the literal drawing board to recast the site. A couple of those plans show the Arts Education Center.

Pinnacle/Ram, the team courting the city for the now-\$14.9 million project, presented six plans to the council last Tuesday night, Nov. 6.

"The economics have changed," said Councilman Ron Govin, who has served as the council's representative during discussions and negotiations with the developer.

"Financially, they all make some sense," the councilman added.

The financial component has changed for various reasons, including the inclusion or exclusion of the arts center, along with Pinnacle/Ram's decision not to develop the riverfront property with townhomes.

Instead, the developer has decided not to buy the nearly 5-acre parcel from the city. Pinnacle/Ram has cut almost \$2 million from its proposed purchase price because it won't buy that piece of land.

Along with looking to the council for direction on the site plan, Pinnacle/Ram needed the council to approve an extension to its deadline for performing its due diligence work. The deadline had been set for Nov. 9.

While the entire council agreed to giving Pinnacle/Ram more time to get their work done, some cautioned being too lenient with offering extensions.

The developer wanted a 60-day extension with the ability to request two additional 30-day extensions.

Instead, the council approved a 43-day initial extension. After that, Pinnacle/Ram would have to come before the council to explain why the team needs more time.

The current hang-ups Pinnacle/Ram has involve traffic needs along N. 56th Street and stormwater.

The developer has to get approval from the Florida Department of Transportation and the Southwest Florida Water Management District (Swiftmud) before Pinnacle/Ram can move forward.

FDOT's concerns focus on the number and locations of median cuts along N. 56th Street, giving customers access to the businesses on the west side of the road.

At this stage, it's the city's responsibility to work out a plan for the businesses before FDOT could sign off on the transportation plan, which is what Pinnacle/Ram is waiting for.

City Engineer Joe Motta and Community Services Director Ralph Bosek said that they would work to clear the FDOT hurdles. They will be meeting with the business owners in the coming weeks to address access points and create a plan.

As for Swiftmud, the agency has said that the redevelopment of the north end of the site could not utilize the stormwater pond to the south. Instead, Pinnacle/Ram would have to provide a stormwater vault underground to handle the water runoff.

It is unclear whether the water agency would grant a variance, though it is a possibility, according to city staff.

Councilman Ron Govin, who has represented the council during discussions and negotiations with Pinnacle/Ram, asked the developer what else the team has to do to complete its due diligence – provided that FDOT and Swiftmud sign off on the plans.

Scott "Skipper" Peek, the managing partner at Pinnacle Realty Advisors, said that the team is still

working on the Kash n' Karry/Sweetbay lease, among others.

During the discussion, Councilman Mark Knapp turned his gaze on Peek and made a point to say: "Point blank, I'm going to look you eye to eye. Is this deal going to get done?"

"We've got more work to do, OK?" replied Peek. "We're making progress on it. And we still have some unknowns we have to refine... I wouldn't be here if I didn't think that we couldn't do it because we've got other things to do."

As for the site plans, council members showed displeasure in having more plans to look at.

"I just want to stop approving all these site plans," said Councilman Frank Chillura, adding that at some point the city has to say, "This is it. Take it or leave it."

Some of the plans show an Arts Education Center north of Sweetbay, disconnected from the supermarket's building. Others show a new bank where Burger King is currently situated. The Burger King could be moved away from the intersection at N. 56th and Bullard and placed at the corner of Bullard and "Main Street" – a new road that would run the length of the development.

Other changes show the lack of townhomes along the riverfront on the south end of the redevelopment area.

Pinnacle/Ram announced earlier this year that it would rather not take on the residential-only component given the state of the housing market.

However, the developer still shows housing within the live/work component of redevelopment, placing condos or rental units above office and retail space.

Councilman Ken Halloway echoed Chillura's sentiments regarding the ever-changing site plans, saying that over the course of last several years he has accumulated a drawer full of site plans. "We've spent so much time," the councilman said. "We wasted so much time that right now I don't believe that you could find 10 people in this town who sincerely believe that this project will ever be done."

The council is expected to select a site plan at the next meeting, which will be Nov. 20. After that, Pinnacle/Ram has until Dec. 18 to complete its due diligence or else ask for a 30-day extension.

If the developer needs more time and the city does not grant it, it is possible that either the developer or the city could terminate its agreement with the other.