

# Next developer, please! What others say about downtown prospects

By Debbie Carson

*Staff Writer*

At least two of the three developers that have expressed interest in bringing Temple Terrace's downtown dreams to reality are still interested in the project.

The Temple Terrace City Council was expected to make a decision Tuesday whether to proceed as planned with Pinnacle/Ram or move on to another developer.

Their decision was not known as of press. (Coverage of that meeting can be found on the Beacon's Web site: [www.CNewsPubs.com](http://www.CNewsPubs.com). See details below.)

Michael Vlass, of the Vlass Group, said that he has not kept tabs on how the redevelopment effort has been going. However, he said that should the city decide to sever its ties with Pinnacle/Ram, he would be interested in taking on the project.

"We are available," he said. The Vlass Group is one of three firms that joined to create Temple Terrace Investments, the partnership that bid on the project last year. This partnership had been ranked first by the city's staff for the project; however, the council chose Pinnacle/Ram over Temple Terrace Investments.

"We have a very good feel for what is needed," Vlass said of the targeted downtown area.

Vlass said he could not comment on the issues Pinnacle/Ram has faced in its effort to reach a deal with the city, explaining that he has not followed the company's progress, nor seen what the other developer has pro-

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posed.

"You need to know how to do it," Vlass said of creating a mixed use, vertical development.

The city's plans to mix residential, office and retail uses within the targeted 35 acres. Some portions of the development would include residential units built above retail or office space.

Some of the stumbling blocks Pinnacle/Ram has faced include the lease with Sweetbay and the amount of money the city is willing to invest in the project.

Vlass said that he is well aware of the problems the downtown redevelopment project has to overcome.

"This is nowhere near the most difficult project" he would have ever worked on, Vlass said, if Temple Terrace Investments were selected for the downtown development.

"We'll come up with something they'll be happy with," he said of City Council.

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DeBartolo Development, of Tampa, is another developer waiting in the wings for a chance to build a new downtown core for the city.

Ranked fourth after a series of city interviews last year, DeBartolo could potentially wait years, if Pinnacle/Ram, Temple Terrace Investments, and Riverhills Temple Terrace LLC, fail to create a project that works for the city.

Bill Rain, who led DeBartolo's team to craft a plan for the project, is no longer with the developer, he said.

However, he has been keeping track of the project.

"It's been fun to follow," Rain said, expressing pleasure that the council members are having difficulty finding a plan that gives them what they want at a price they can afford.

He said that had the city selected DeBartolo from the beginning, they would

not be facing the possibility of losing more time by changing developers.

The advisory committee that ranked DeBartolo fourth of four did so because the developer's plan was, in essence, a fresh coat of paint for the aging strip center.

Debra Roman, DeBartolo's director of development, worked with Rain on the Temple Terrace downtown plan.

She, too, has not been following the project.

"It doesn't surprise me a bit," Roman said, when she heard about what the City Council decided at its Feb. 6 meeting - giving Pinnacle/Ram two weeks to come up with alternate plans that make financial sense for the city.

Roman said that DeBartolo had submitted a realistic plan that the city could afford, but the city rejected it.

Looking at the other developers' plans, Roman said she realized that the plans required a significant amount of money from the city "and that wouldn't fly."

While she couldn't say for certain, Roman said she thought DeBartolo would still be interested in working with the city to come up with a workable downtown project.

"It's definitely a project the city needs," Roman said.

Attempts to contact representatives from the city's No. 3 firm - Riverhills Temple Terrace LLC - were unsuccessful.

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Temple Terrace Investments cannot provide a timeline or detailed costs. The joint venture of The Vlass Group, MJ Lant Development Inc., and Marketplace Advisors, is known for its work on the Altamonte Town Center.

Riverhills Temple Terrace LLC would build a winding north-south Main Street through the middle of the property and would build City Hall in Phase I. In Phase I, the firm plans to build the Sweetbay grocery, retail stores facing 56th Street with parking, the first parking structure, and City Hall and the Post Office. "By the end of Phase I, we will have a 3-block, 900-foot long main street, 200 residences and a public square."

Tampa-based DeBartolo calls for creating quick momentum on a troubled project by creating a new face on 80 percent of existing space, keeping Sweetbay, Burger King and Regions Bank where they are, creating a restaurant row inside the property and linking stores and shops by awning covered walkways, not necessarily along busy 56th St.