

Arts center to be part of city's downtown

By Debbie Carson, Staff Writer

TEMPLE TERRACE — After two hours of discussion last week, Temple Terrace city council members struck a compromise: proceed with its 22,000-square-foot Arts and Education Center in the downtown region and approve \$108,000 for renderings and design plans that can be used to garner community and corporate pledges for funding.

The challenge? The council needs drawings and plans to show potential investors in the Arts and Education Center. But the council needs to know that the community and corporations are willing to support the center before feeling comfortable enough to approve spending almost \$500,000 on detailed drawings and plans.

The city held a special council meeting at 8:30 a.m. last Tuesday, March 11, to discuss the Arts and Education Center.

Throughout the 2-hour meeting, it was apparent that all on the council were supportive of including the civic building in the project – they just weren't sure about spending more than \$480,000 on a complete design package for something that perhaps the citizens would not support.

The center requires a \$7 million investment – at least, once the land costs, design and construction and operational costs are taken into account. And that doesn't factor in the parking garage that would be needed to serve the parking needs of the center's patrons.

Currently, the city has a \$2-million pledge from the Pepin Distributing Co., and \$2.5 million in Community Investment Tax revenue. The city has also set aside \$500,000 to buy the land back from the downtown developers, Pinnacle/Ram.

That leaves \$2 million that needs to be generated from community donors and other corporations – just for construction. The center also needs to start out with a \$1 million endowment, ideally. Councilman Mark Knapp said that he was concerned about spending nearly a half-million dollars for renderings and detailed plans for the center without knowing whether the city can truly afford the expense of building, maintaining and operating the center.

Councilman Frank Chillura echoed Knapp's sentiments.

"I want to do what's best for the city," Chillura said, but noted that he was struggling with the unknowns and variables. He needs to know that the citizens will be making firm pledges for donations.

He and Knapp referenced the adage pertaining to the cart and the horse.

Councilman Ron Govin said that he believed the problem was that the council had not identified the horse, noting that the city can't get money from the community without the plans but that those plans have to be such that both the city and community can approve.

Councilman Ken Halloway expressed his support of the new Arts and Education Center but also pointed out that one of his concerns is that of Masque.

"There's a risk," Halloway said, explaining that Masque Community Theatre could be without a home for so long that it would either disband or move elsewhere and not come back once the Arts and Education Center opens.

He has said before at prior council meetings that he would like for there to be a provision in the city's contract with Pinnacle/Ram that Masque would be able to maintain its current location and status within the downtown area until the arts center is completed.

Currently, Pinnacle/Ram has verbally agreed to approximately 12 months from date of the purchase's

closing, which is scheduled for July.

Another issue regarding the Arts and Education Center has yet to be worked out. The council took an unofficial vote on whether to include the Council Chambers.

Knapp, Chillura, Govin and even Mayor Joe Affronti all voiced support for the relocation of the chambers.

Councilwoman Alison Fernandez said that she would support moving the chambers to the center only if the chambers would not adversely affect the ability for performances, meetings and other revenue-generating activities to be held.

Halloway said that he was not in support of moving the chambers.