

Developer asks flexibility in colors, lights, signage

By Debbie Carson
Staff Writer

TEMPLE TERRACE — For the second time, Temple Terrace city leaders continued a public hearing on the downtown redevelopment's proposed changes. The hearing is scheduled for 8 a.m. Wednesday, June 25. The reason for the further delay is the city's redevelopment partner asked to make changes to the downtown site plan.

Councilman Ken Holloway voiced concern about the requested changes during the June 10 early morning public hearing, which no members of the general public attended.

He said that he had only received the requested revisions that morning and had not had a chance to look them over carefully. He did not like what he saw.

"It appears to me that a lot of them are to the detriment of the city," Holloway said. He added that though he understands Pinnacle/Ram's need for flexibility, the city has regulations for a reason.

"In the interest of the city, I do believe that... we are losing some control of what we want to see out there," Holloway said.

The requested modifications include:

- Asking the city to be more flexible with the allowable colors, the lighting, the signage, and the landscaping;
- Not requiring the developer to reconstruct the backs of the existing building – where Sweetbay and Masque currently are – to match the fronts of the building;
- And allowing restaurants to increase their space by 10 percent by having more outdoor dining, among other requests.

The council met on June 3 to open the first of two public hearings on the downtown project's site plan. Based on what the council heard during that meeting, it decided to continue the public hearing to Tuesday, June 10.

By the end of the early morning hearing last week, the council decided another continuance was in order and scheduled it for next Wednesday.

The delays are expected to push back the projected closing date for the sale of the 20-acre redevelopment site to sometime in August. The city and development team had hoped for a July 1 closing.

"Our staff has worked diligently," said Community Development Director Charles Stephenson of running down the changes Pinnacle/Ram wants to make.

He said during the June 10 meeting that he did not believe the city had given his staff enough time to adequately address the issues.

One of the sticking points between Stephenson's office at the city and the developer has been the back of the existing Sweetbay center, which is going to get a facelift instead of being torn down and rebuilt. "I think it deserves a little bit more than a little bit of paint on the back of these buildings," he said.

Erica Kubia, a representative for Pinnacle/Ram, said that it is their belief that there is no need to make the backside of the buildings to look just like the fronts considering that customers would not be entering the buildings from the rear.

She pointed to one of the site plan's conditions to make her argument. The condition, number four, reads in part, "The east (backside) elevations of existing retail buildings B, C, D and E (the Sweetbay center) shall receive architectural treatment similar in appearance to those of the west (front) elevations."

Stephenson contends that "similar" is not "same" and means that the backside needs to be brought up to code, cleaned up and be dressed up.

"I don't think it's unreasonable," he said.

Council members agreed that the backs don't have to be exactly like the fronts but that they do need to be improved.

Councilman Ron Govin, who has served as the city's representative during negotiations, said that he believes that a compromise could be reached between the city and developer on the requested modifications.

"There's certainly a solution in between," he said.

The council hopes to reach that solution by June 25's public hearing. If they can come to an accord during that hearing, they will be able to hold the second required hearing two weeks later, sometime in July.

The date of that hearing will be set during the June 25 meeting.