



Downtown Needs Unified Strategic Planning Vision

By GRANT RIMBEY

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Although I'm glad the Kress building will be preserved, I was appalled at the stance of the article "History Tops Condos," (Metro, March 10).

It's generally understood that developers call the shots in Hillsborough County, but I was surprised to see such blatant developer-speak regarding downtown Tampa's historic fabric.

The idea of surrounding a historic building with an ill-thought monstrosity that completely neglects the street level, context and any notion of good design - as a means of preserving it - is a new one.

When renowned planner Andres Duany gave a presentation on New Urbanism and the planning of our own downtown redevelopment in 2002, he encouraged us not to be "beggars." I now pass this wisdom along to the people of Tampa, not to be beggars with their own downtown. Demand good design and planning.

What Tampa needs is not piecemeal and developer-led, but a unified strategic planning vision that looks at the entire downtown. A progressive and well-done plan would be created by the citizens of Tampa via public workshops with a top-notch planning team - as Temple Terrace created its own downtown master plan - and it would include a new downtown building code that outlined what, where and how to build to collectively create the walkable, mixed-use downtown Mayor Pam Iorio says Tampa wants.

If the code were well-written, the concept of a condominium engulfing an historic building wouldn't even make it to the table.

The developers who run things in our area don't want a master plan or code that tells them what to build and where, as it conflicts with their priority of building whatever turns the biggest profit and moving on.

This is not how great cities are created and built.

Unfortunately, we can't expect much support from the Hillsborough County Commission in this endeavor. Several years ago a group of us fought valiantly to save one of the last historic buildings in Brandon, the circa 1900 Galvin-Jaudon house.

The house and lot were owned by the church of a certain county commissioner. They wanted to tear down the house so they could use the site as an overflow parking lot. Not surprisingly, historic preservation and planning were thrown out the window. The house is no more.

It seems to me that a community discussion should be initiated in Hillsborough County regarding historic preservation, planning and architecture. These rarely coincide with the bottom line of the developer, yet all are crucial to preserving our quality of life here in Central Florida.

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