

Downtown will change, one way or another

The redevelopment director is not taking setbacks personally.

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Ralph Bosek, this city's redevelopment director, says he isn't bitter to see that the future of its downtown is in limbo yet again.

Four months ago, he and his staff tried vigorously to convince the Temple Terrace City Council to hire an outsider to build a city center that has been in dreams, plans and revisions for more than five years. The city disregarded his recommendation and festively picked Pinnacle Realty Advisors of Tampa for their local connections and what the city declared a thorough plan.

On Tuesday, after a grueling council meeting, Pinnacle was given two weeks to revise its designs or the city will sever its relationship with the firm.

At the time of the selection, Pinnacle, which works in partnership with Ram Development of Palm Beach Gardens, offered colorful and rather comprehensive drawings with cost estimates to follow. But when the number finally came in late last year, city officials did not like what they saw. The developer offered to buy 19.7 acres of the southeast corner of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway for \$11.7-million - about \$3-million short of the city's expectations.

"The whole council feels we should be receiving no less than what we have paid for the property," said Ron Govin, a council member who has been negotiating with the developer for the past two months.

So far, the city has spent \$22-million on a total of 35 acres in the quadrant.

The redevelopment director, Bosek, said he is consumed by the project, but he's not bitter.

"Once the council makes a decision, that is what we need to work with," he said.

The question is: Will it happen?

Both Bosek and Govin say there's frustration with Pinnacle and with the pace of the development, but there has been progress as well. This week, for the first time, the city worked out a forecast of revenue and

spending outlays for the development. Also, Bosek said some smaller projects have started in what is to ultimately be a more than 200-acre revitalization of Temple Terrace.

It may be that Pinnacle will not join the movement. Skipper Peek, a managing partner with the company, declined to comment.

Govin said negotiations with the developer have been difficult. "They are not willing to make any changes."

The impasse originated from what has now become a major obstacle in the revitalization: the Sweetbay grocery chain, which has a store in the quadrant, a valuable lease lasting until 2044 and control of about 42 percent of the plaza. This situation stymied the previous developer, the Orlando-based Unicorp with whom the city aborted its relationship in July.

In December Sweetbay asked for \$3.175-million to give up its lease and move to a new location in the plaza.

"From the city's perspective that seems like a lot of money," Bosek said. He and his staff spent the past several weeks on a financial blueprint that would leave the grocery store in the same location and develop the area around it. The city estimates that by doing so, the investment needed would drop by about \$18-million and long-term cumulative profits could increase by \$14-million by 2034.

Pinnacle has until Feb. 20 to revise its design accordingly. If the developer fails to do so, the city will ax the partnership and will invite the developer that ranked second in last year's selection process to a partnership - if they are still interested, that is.

That developer is the Georgia-based joint-venture of the Vlass Group and MJ Lant Development - the very company that Bosek so strongly recommended four months ago.

If this new alliance indeed comes to fruition, Bosek is not going to feel vindicated. It's not about emotions, he said, it's about transforming the blighted plaza into a welcoming downtown. He has been on the job since 2004 and he says it doesn't matter who the developer is.

"I came here to deliver something," he said. "It's not here yet. But we're getting there and it's my job to take us there."