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## At long last, Temple Terrace closes a deal to build a town center

By Robbyn Mitchell, Times Staff Writer  
In Print: Friday, July 24, 2009



THIS WAS THE GOAL: Temple Terrace has tried for nearly a decade to develop a real town core, something accessible and inviting with charm and personality. This is a rendering of the original Torti Gallas concept that has been scaled down.

[Torti Gallas and Partners Inc.]

TEMPLE TERRACE — It has been a long road to Thursday night for residents of Tampa's northern neighbor.

Nearly 100 people showed up at Omar K. Lightfoot Recreational Center to meet the men behind the recently inked deal to transform the run-down shopping center at the corner of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway into a town center they could be proud of.

"We're helping you design your home," said Atlanta-based banker turned developer Mike Vlass. "The community has been involved in this intimately for 10 years."

With the agreement executed June 30, developers say they are less than a year from breaking ground. But the project's history of setbacks has jaded some residents.

"We are not a bedroom community," said Christine Donohue, president of Temple Terrace's more than 500 member Chamber of Commerce. "We are a city, and what we're looking for here is a sense of place."

Vlass and his team listened at length to community concerns about architecture and shade and threw out a few ideas of his own — even pitching the proposed condos for older residents.

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[KATHLEEN FLYNN | Times]

THIS IS THE STARTING POINT: The Kash n' Karry


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"(This meeting) gave sense of who's in charge," said resident Greg Vawter. "Some of it is a PR gesture to let us know they care about what we think."

But the overwhelming feeling was excitement about the possibilities drenched in weariness from being on this road before.

After acquiring 35 acres for nearly \$22 million dollars in the early part of the decade, the city set out to find out what residents wanted in a series of meetings.

Then five years ago, the city paid \$315,000 to Torti Gallas and Partners, a Maryland architecture and urban planning firm, to do market studies, meet with citizens and draw up a version of Camelot for the country club and orange grove community.

Planners came back with a grand riverfront mixed-use project with hundreds of homes, city buildings, retail projects and plenty of room to walk around and take in the Mediterranean Revival architecture.

Then-community redevelopment director Ralph Bosek said the city should be able to sell the property for more than enough money to retire its \$20 million cost for the old Kash n' Karry Plaza. But two failed development deals later, City Council members agreed to convey the land to Vlass Group instead of selling it.

Only council members Ron Govin and Alison Fernandez voted against the plan.

Fernandez said at the June 30 meeting that the plan seemed rushed and there had been so many last-minute changes to a 100-page agreement that the council should take more time to study it.

And Govin said he thought the city should have been paid for the land.

In previous agreements, the city agreed to sell the land to developers provided that they met certain requirements.

Orlando-based Unicorp National Developments was the first developer to sign on in 2005 and got the ax in 2006 after failing to meet deadlines.

And residents shot down a referendum in August 2005 that would have raised the property tax by 1 mil or \$125 for \$150,000 in property value. That would have paid for part of the city's expected \$65 million contribution toward getting the development off of the ground.

The second developer, Pinnacle Realty of Tampa and Ram Development of Palm Beach Gardens, dived headlong into the project, scaling back expectations from the original 38 acre master plan to the less than 20 acres. But they backed out in 2008 after two years of negotiations with the city.

Under the latest agreement, Temple Terrace will pay the roughly \$20 million mortgage on the nearly 29-acre property and retain the right to reacquire any undeveloped land if Vlass breaks the contract. Vlass has three years to start building the first phase and 13 years to complete all three phases.

In addition to building retail shops, offices and residences, Vlass will make street, utility and infrastructure improvements, including creating a "main street" from the north end of the property to Chicago Drive on the south.

Vlass has two years to submit site plans for Phase 1. The company then will have to start construction by June 2012, according to the agreement developers signed with the city last month.

Mike Lant of M.J. Lant developments, which is partnering with Vlass, said development of Phase 1 should begin in Spring 2010 and be complete by Thanksgiving 2010.

"But that's just the schedule right now," he added. "And I'm sure you know there a lot of things that could slow that down."

*Times staff writer Jared Leone contributed to this report. Robbyn Mitchell can be reached at (813) 226-3373 or rmitchell@sptimes.com.*

The three phases of the project include:  
• Area A, which consists of the former Kash n' Karry plaza, will have at least 375,000

strip mall at 56th Street and Bullard Parkway, where Temple Terrace plans to start their downtown redevelopment was part of 35 acres for which the city paid \$22 million.

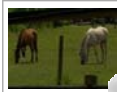
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square feet for commercial use and 350 residential units.  
• Area B, which includes the North River Plaza, will have at least 100,000 square feet for commercial use and 100 residential units.  
• Area C, the riverfront property, will include 100 residential units.

**Hed goes here**

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**Area A**, which consists of the former Kash n' Karry plaza, will have at least 375,000 square feet for commercial use and 350 residential units.

**Area B**, which includes the North River Plaza, will have at least 100,000 square feet for commercial use and 100 residential units.

**Area C**, the riverfront property, will include 100 residential units.

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**JW from Brooksville**

**Jul 24th, 2009 6:55 AM**

Careful, folks. If Phase 1 includes demolition and ANY roadway improvements there is NO way that can be done in 6-8 months! Man speaka with forked tongue.

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