

Developer of 'downtown' gets pink slip

Temple Terrace gives itself 90 days to find a new Bullard Parkway choreographer.

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TEMPLE TERRACE - In yet another twist of the five-year-long saga of the Temple Terrace revitalization, the city on Monday aborted its relationship with the developer, Unicorp National Developments.

The termination came after officials at the Orlando-based Unicorp asked Ralph Bosek, the city's redevelopment director, for a 60-day extension to meet negotiation conditions imposed on the company in early June.

The city, however, decided during a special council meeting to let Unicorp go and to find a new developer within 90 days.

"We are where we are," said Ron Govin, a City Council member. "We have more information now than we've ever had and we should be able to move on quickly."

It has been an uphill ordeal for the city to bring to fruition a plan to transform the depressed southeast corner of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway into a boutique-like downtown that the city's 22,000 residents would enjoy.

The city has spent about \$22-million on 35 acres of the 38-acre parcel. It has seen architects come and go and has considered a small horde of architectural proposals for the plaza.

In August 2005, it lost a referendum for a 1-mill tax increase to allow issuing up to \$20-million in bonds for the project.

Officials have spent the past year in an unsuccessful and at times bitter relationship with Unicorp. It never received a satisfactory architectural plan that would take under consideration the town's desire for a New Urbanist-style, high-density, walkable downtown. Also at issue was the location of a Sweetbay grocery store, an important player in the redevelopment.

In the end, it was Sweetbay that finally presented an agreeable plan to the city in early June. The grocer has a Kash n' Karry in the quadrant and is a tenant of more than 42 percent of the plaza, with a lucrative, lengthy lease expiring in 2044.

Renegotiation of the lease by Aug. 6 was chief among the conditions given to Unicorp by the city. The lease had not been resolved by the time the relationship with the developer was terminated, Bosek said.

Russ Lake of Sweetbay told the council Monday that the grocer is ready to speak to the city and any potential developer at any time.

"We're 100 percent on board," he said.

The city gave Bosek and his staff three months to seek a new developer to take over the project and build the plaza in accordance with the Sweetbay prototype, which calls for the grocery store to be in a courtyard surrounded by little shops and condos.

Council member Frank Chillura, who had long urged the city to forgo its relationship with Unicorp, said the city should be careful in choosing a new developer.

"We don't want to rush it and have poor quality proposals," Chillura said. "And we want to ask tough questions."