

Despite compromise, Sweetbay plan still causes distress in Temple Terrace

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TEMPLE TERRACE -- Although at least two Temple Terrace city council members were ready to cut ties, [Unicorp National Developments Inc.](#) will get two more months to prove that it can redevelop the city's downtown.

With what is being described as operating with a "gun to the head," the Orlando-based developer has to finalize a lease agreement with [Sweetbay Supermarkets](#) by November and secure the services of [New Urban](#) architect David Kitchens by the beginning of July. If it doesn't, officials such as Councilman Frank Chillura and Councilwoman Glenda Venable say they're ready to start the whole process over again with a new developer.

"I'm personally not comfortable with the way we're going," Chillura told Unicorp's VP of retail development Austin Simmons during a council meeting Tuesday night. Chillura said a lot of his frustration stemmed from Simmons assuring the council last year that a deal could be worked out quickly with Sweetbay, which operates a Kash n' Karry store with a long-term lease within the 38 acres targeted for redevelopment.

That deal didn't materialize until recently when city officials once again became involved with the negotiations, leading Sweetbay officials to initially form a compromise on store location and placement in more of a New Urban-style design, Chillura said.

While a few dozen residents attending Sweetbay's presentation of the compromise a week before applauded the new plan, Chillura said the situation between Sweetbay and the city is far from over.

"We still have some very, very, very big hurdles to overcome," Chillura said. "They (Sweetbay) are going to be asking for an awful lot (from the city). The question is, can the developer live with the conditions that Sweetbay will want to impose?"

Time to start over?

Simmons presented the city council with some more advanced ideas and timelines involving the redevelopment area where two aging, mostly vacant shopping plazas sit. While many aspects of the plan still have to be worked out, including Sweetbay's lease and final location in the plan, Simmons said dirt could be moving within a year on the first phase. He also said that some of the shops now located on the site have a strong chance of moving over to the mixed-use development when it's completed with little or no interruption in business.

"You have some of the existing tenants who want to stay," Simmons said. "I think you can accommodate most of your tenants who want to stay."

But Chillura disagreed, saying some of the small businesses there survive only because their rents are around \$12 per square foot. The new retail areas will most likely have rents beginning at \$27 per square foot, which would be impossible for many of them to pay.

City Attorney Ted Taub, who two weeks ago issued a 15-page memo expressing his disapproval of how the council has ignored his advice in approaching the redevelopment, said that while he has been virtually left out of nearly all the dealings the city has had with Unicorp, it would be in the city's best interest to at least see if Unicorp can achieve some of the goals that have been set in coming months. Otherwise, the project overall could be delayed for years.

"Give them a chance and see what they can do," Taub said. "I'll tell you in a second if they're not up to the task."

City officials have envisioned a pedestrian friendly, retail/residential development to be on the site leading from Bullard Parkway to eventually the Hillsborough River. Besides offices, condominiums and the Sweetbay store, officials also have plans to build a new city hall and some type of community/performing arts center on the site.

While the original Unicorp plan was designed to cost \$220 million, company officials said it was too early to talk about how much the latest plans would cost.