

City plays catch-up with key player in downtown makeover

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TEMPLE TERRACE - The epoch effort to redevelop a 38-acre parcel downtown hasn't suffered from a lack of input. But now, one of the key players in the process is finally taking a seat at the table.

When voters rejected a \$20 million bond issue in August 2005 that would have funded a \$60 million tab for taxpayers, the project's developer, [Unicorp National Developments Inc.](#) of Orlando, started revising plans. Those changes included the possibility of moving [Sweetbay Supermarkets](#), owner of the existing Kash n' Karry grocery store, to the other side of the parcel -- changes that evoked much public discourse.

But the only folks missing in the dialogue were executives at Sweetbay, which holds a 38-year lease, and with it, leverage.

Now, Sweetbay executives are planning to make a presentation to the City Council May 31 in what store officials are describing as an "introduction." But with the project nearly entering its seventh year, some are wondering why introductions are happening now.

"Your guess is as good as mine at this point," said Councilman Frank Chillura. "Until we have more facts presented to us, there is not much to discuss until we have more things on the table."

Original plans for the redevelopment had Sweetbay virtually staying where it is on the south end of the project at North 56th Street and Bullard Parkway.

The most recent plan of the 38 acres of redevelopment land moves the grocery store's location more than a block north, closer to the 56th Street/Bullard intersection. A pair of strip malls exists there now.

However, the plans by Unicorp now call for the 39,000-square-foot Sweetbay to face 56th Street, and unlike the other tenants planned for the site, to have a sizeable parking lot between its store and the main road.

New urbanism casualty?

That's contrary to the New Urban approach city officials had been striving for, which would have buildings -- not parking lots -- abutting the roads.

"For any redevelopment opportunities up there, they're going to have to come in and follow the new plan," said Tom Kurpinski, a retail broker with [CB Richard Ellis](#), a company

representing the [U.S. Post](#) Office in the development. "They are putting the buildings 10 feet off the curb. I would think it might cause some problems if not everyone has to do it."

But compromise, even if it means not getting the full effect of New Urbanism, is necessary when trying to keep an anchor, Kurpinski said.

"You can't afford to lose the grocery store," he said. "Especially when it comes to retailers."