

A Better Place drops out of Temple Terrace redevelopment project

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Stating that redeveloping Temple Terrace's downtown core is beyond the scope of its core business, **A Better Place Group** withdrew its name from consideration to redevelop 35 acres just south of Bullard Parkway and North 56th Street.

That leaves four groups in contention to take on the project, which looks to transform two strip malls, a pair of small office buildings and a few outparcels into a mixed-use project that is expected to include retail, commercial and residential elements.

"As we have 'drilled down' into the (request for qualifications), we understand that you really need a vertical building developer," Anne-Marie Lenton, vice president of A Better Place Group, said in a statement to Temple Terrace city officials. Lenton said that her organization's response was done on very short notice at the request of several city residents. However, aspects of the project, including financing, construction, leasing and management, had very little to do with what the group does.

That now leaves just **DeBartolo Development LLC**; the combined efforts of **Pinnacle Realty Advisors, Ram Development Co.** and Cooper Carry; **Riverhills Temple Terrace LLC** and **Temple Terrace Investments LLC** as the four groups still in contention. They are expected to make presentations in front of city council Oct. 4 and Oct. 5. A final selection is scheduled for Oct. 12.

The project has seen its share of struggles.

The city's downtown redevelopment project has been in motion since 2000, and much of the property has been under city ownership since 2003 after multi-million-dollar purchases of two aging shopping plazas and several outparcels a short time later. During the city's first attempt to bring in a developer in September 2003, nearly all of the groups that expressed official interest in taking over the project dropped out, and only two actually made presentations to the city. Dover, Kohl & Partners of Coral Gables was named the planner, but that company withdrew just two months later leaving the only other choice, Maryland-based Torti Gallas and Partners. That firm dropped out less than a year later, and Orlando-based Unicorp National Developments Inc. was brought in late 2005, but then dropped out of the project in this past summer after admitting it could not reach a deal with major property leaseholder Sweetbay Supermarkets by the city's imposed deadline.

In August 2005, a referendum intended to infuse \$20 million in taxpayer money through a 1-mill property tax increase into the project to pay for infrastructure and other needs was defeated by voters 57 to 43 percent.

Since Unicorp's withdrawal, city officials have been working to fast-track the project, seeking to bring in the project's fourth master planner in three years, and have them in place by the end of October.