

Downtown plan less than vision, but it's approved

also appeared as

Temple Terrace takes next step in redevelopment plan

TEMPLE TERRACE -- Meeting harsh criticism and an even harder vote, city council members decided Tuesday afternoon to move forward with a downtown redevelopment plan that is less grand than the mixed-used urban hub it set out to create six years ago.

The agreed upon plan would sell more than 16 acres of land owned by the city to Ram Pinnacle, a south Florida developer, to build retail, office and residential buildings, a parking garage and an arts and education center at the intersection of N 56th Street and Bullard Parkway.

It omits the original idea for waterfront residential development on the city's property, reducing the sale price from \$16.9-million to \$13.2-million.

Two council members, Frank M. Chillura and Ken Halloway, opposed the plan for very different reasons.

Chillura asked Pinnacle representatives if they would be able to reduce the \$1.2-million in public funding they requested as a market adjustment fee, and they denied that possibility.

"I want to support the moving forward," he said. But, he said, he objected to the city paying the developer the fee, which was designed to offset the downturn in real estate values.

Halloway dissented because the project no longer resembles the original idea of a downtown redevelopment. He kept referring to the structure as "another strip mall."

"I was told that this was the best the developer could do," he said. "And I believe that. That's why I think we should begin looking for new developer."

The vote passed 3-2 despite the dissent.

In 2005, residents voted down a referendum to raise taxes to fund the project. And the project's first developer and the city parted ways before the sale was final.

After an extensive developer search, Pinnacle was selected more than a year ago to take the helm. But Pinnacle has had difficulty making deadlines and asked the city for an extension of its 90-day due diligence a month ago.

The city gave the company 45 days -- grudgingly.

A resolution was put on the table that Pinnacle could have more time, if it was able to prove it had made progress with the Department of Transportation and drainage problems it said had put it behind schedule.

What Pinnacle returned with was a revised site plan and a proposed schedule that could possibly have the sale of the property close in July.

Councilman Ron Govin urged the city to push the plan because of the financial setbacks the city incurs every year it doesn't sell the property.

"Every year we don't sell we pay \$2-million in interest on the property," he said. "We can't afford not to go forward."

Several community members stood to speak on behalf of accepting the proposed development and some admonished the city for taking so long.

"You hired experts to advise you on how to proceed, please heed that advice," said Mel Jurado, a fundraising volunteer. "Stop stepping over dollars to pick up pennies."

Now that the plan was passed, the real work begins, said Community Services Director Ralph Bosek.

"People think that this was the hard part but it should have been the easy part," he said. "There is a lot of work to be done between now and closing."

Robbyn Mitchell, Times staff writer