

Chillura Accuses Unicorp Of Misleading City Council

SWEETBAY LEASE IS AT ISSUE

By JOYCE MCKENZIE

jmckenzie@medialgeneral.com

"Their plan, their city, their future," was the message imprinted below an emblazoned Sweetbay Supermarkets' logo of the T-shirt Temple Terrace Redevelopment Task Force member Grant Rimbey flashed before city council members last week.

Its purpose was to emphasize his 15-member resident-driven group's objection to Unicorp National Developments of Orlando's latest scaled-down plan to revitalize Terrace Plaza, which is at 56th Street and Bullard Parkway.

The idea to spruce up the site began several years ago as a vision for a pedestrian-friendly New Urbanist multistory retail, office, cultural and living center where Mediterranean-style buildings would line 56th Street, some 10 feet from its curb.

However, after the failed Aug. 2 bond referendum that would help pay for its infrastructure, in December Unicorp disclosed a modified plan, one that was less grandiose but still embraced the planners' dreams.

Then, a new Unicorp rendering was unveiled May 2 when the development company and city officials realized Kash n' Karry/Sweetbay Supermarkets - which operates a store in the redevelopment area with a 38-year lease - had become a "fly in the project's ointment."

Thus, to accommodate its wishes the 56th Street storefront buildings were replaced by elevated landscaping bordering a parking lot in front of its projected new Sweetbay store.

In a meeting earlier in the day - prior to last week's council meeting - between Unicorp's co-owner Lee J. Maher, a Kash n' Karry representative, city manager Kim Leinbach, Community Services Director Ralph Beseck and Mayor Joe Affronti - Leinbach expressed Sweetbay's desire to present its plan to council members within three to four weeks.

"They were never involved in an opportunity to show us what they have," Affronti said. "The consensus I got is that they really want to be involved in this community."

Regardless, Affronti's comments didn't resonate well with Patrick Finelli, the redevelopment task force chairman.

"We were outspoken and forthright in voicing our objection to the plan," he said.

Temple Terrace resident Charlotte Encarnas also expressed her discontent with the latest version of the plan.

"It's disappointing to see what's happened to the redevelopment plan," she said. "Shouldn't lease agreements have been discussed before we got involved in the project?"

Business owner Ken Tozer concurred.

"I've said for years and I've been on the record - this is risky business," he said.

But, Councilman Ron Govin said he is satisfied with the new plan and he's willing to support it, provided Kash n' Karry builds its store in a Mediterranean revival style.

"I'm not willing to buy out their lease - we need to save our revenues," he said. "We need to go on and provide a



Chillura

phenomenal place for our citizens to live and the only thing that's offensive is that front parking lot."

However, councilman Ken Hallowsay took a different stance.

"We have been working on this for five years and wanted New Urbanism because it gave this city a town center - I will not go back to support a big box and a parking lot," Hallowsay said.

Councilman Frank Chillura was livid.

"I'm extremely disgusted and outraged," said Chillura, noting he sat on the council when the city acquired the Kash n' Karry property but was never informed redevelopment plans would be bound by the company's long-term lease.

"To find out a few days ago does not sit well with me," he said. "All along I've had extreme concerns with the lease. ... I asked Unicorp three times and they said the lease is the least of our worries. We've been misled."

In Chillura's judgment the council should cut ties with Unicorp and issue a request for other potential developers.

Instead, Councilwoman Linda Shattles suggested the city consider a deal with Sweetbay to buy out the store's lease.

"Now is the time to nail down what we are going to do with this lease situation before we do anything else," she said. "I think Unicorp needs the same opportunity to wipe the egg off their face."

The council determined its first order of business is to schedule a meeting that would allow Unicorp and Kash n' Karry/Sweetbay officials to present a more in-depth view of their plans.