

Council Approves Master Plan

By GEORGE WILKENS The Tampa Tribune

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TEMPLE TERRACE - A master plan for downtown redevelopment was conceptually approved Tuesday, but unanswered questions and a mood of frustration belie the unanimous vote of the Temple Terrace City Council.

"It's a project that's economically viable," but only marginally, said Skipper Peek, managing partner of Pinnacle Realty Advisors, Tampa, one of three firms in the master developer partnership selected Oct. 12. Based on discussions with city staff, Peek said, "There seems to be a wholesale difference of opinion on how the plan should be approached."

It's clear there is no perfect plan, but the one presented during Tuesday night's redevelopment workshop and subsequent council meeting strikes a balance of "economics and marketability," Peek said.

Outlining the plan, Michael Hammon, of Ram Development, Fort Lauderdale, another member of the development partnership, said Phase 1A would begin at the north end, 56th Street and Bullard Parkway.

The phase of mostly retail stores, including a grocery, is intended to also accommodate a relocated Temple Terrace post office.

There would also be "luxury rental" town homes in the initial phase. Condominiums are too difficult to sell in the current market, but the proposed 50 concrete-construction units could be converted later, Hammon said.

"There is a great deal of unknown right now," Peek acknowledged, adding that much hinges upon negotiating a buyout of the Sweetbay Supermarket lease. The company, Peek learned Tuesday, wants \$3.175 million to give up its long-term lease in the heart of the redevelopment area, he said.

"I think there's room to improve that number," Peek said. "But it won't go to zero," and the city must decide what it can justify to move the grocery into Phase 1A.

The grocery chain, a primary tenant in a shopping plaza the city bought in 2003 for \$5.5 million, has a lease with renewal options through 2044.

Council members said repeatedly that they do not want to tie the hands of the developer, but Peek expressed frustration about continual tweaking of the plan, including altering residential density and parking accommodations.

"We can't continue to swing at a pinata blindfolded," Peek said, adding "Maybe we're not the right people" for the project.

"I can understand the frustration the developer is feeling," said Councilman Frank Chillura. "The staff looks at it from a desk and says, 'That's what we'd like to see,'" while the developer strives to create a viable plan.

"We need to know at some point we're on the right page," Peek said.

City staff, Councilman Ron Govin and the developer will identify differences in their concepts of the plan, resolve what they can and bring the unresolved issues to the council within three weeks.

The city strives to create a 35-acre, New Urbanism-style development southeast of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway with retail, residential, office, restaurant and cultural/civic components.

The city's first developer, Unicorp National Developments, withdrew in July. The Orlando company tried for more than a year to win a city contract to revitalize the area.

Redevelopment was dealt another setback in August 2005, when voters rejected a bond referendum to pay for infrastructure.