

Group Backs Redevelopment

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Temple Terrace's citizens advisory group "strongly encourages city council to pursue redevelopment," despite the failed referendum.

The unanimous recommendation by the Strategic Teamwork and Redevelopment Group, or STAR committee, came at the group's Aug. 4 meeting, two days after voters rejected public funding for the project, 57 percent to 43 percent.

"Clearly, the voters don't want to support infrastructure," committee Chairman Patrick Finelli said of the "landslide defeat."

Had voters approved the measure, the city was poised to sell bonds to help pay its one-fifth share of the proposed \$300 million mixed-use redevelopment.

The city would have paid for parks, sidewalks and other infrastructure in the redevelopment area southeast of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway. The developer ultimately selected for the public-private partnership would be responsible for the retail shops, condominiums and other structures in the "New Urbanism" plan.

"The pro side did not get its voters out, for whatever reason," said Jerry King, the newest STAR member. Older voters opposed it, King said, because the referendum also meant a 1-mill increase in property tax. For a house valued at \$150,000, minus the standard homestead exemption, a 1-mill increase would have meant \$125 annually in additional taxes.

Members speculated that voters had a difficult time wrapping their mind around the large project, were overwhelmed by details and bombarded by conflicting information from referendum proponents and opponents.

The motion encouraging city council to pursue redevelopment includes asking John Stainback to proceed with his detailed financial analysis of the project's initial phase. Stainback, a nationally recognized expert in the public-private real estate industry, was hired July 5 to represent the city in negotiations with Unicorp National Developments, the Orlando company seeking to build the project.

"Stainback is going to give us the dollar and cents values" of the project, Finelli said. "He is the missing piece of the puzzle we needed six months ago."

The next regular city council meeting is 7 p.m. Tuesday.