

A Small Glimpse Of The City's Future

By GEORGE WILKENS The Tampa Tribune

Published: Jan 11, 2007

TEMPLE TERRACE - Although plans for downtown redevelopment are moving slowly, residents may get a preview late this year with prototype streetscapes for the project.

Longtime Temple Terrace resident Rachel Rodgers, a landscape architect, has been working with the city to create a "clean, simple, classic look" for the redevelopment area southeast of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway.

Rodgers' design ideas for landscaping, lighting, crosswalk features and more will be tested in small-scale streetscapes to be built on Temple Heights Road and along one block of 56th Street.

"We're looking at this as cutting the path through what we're trying to achieve here," Rodgers said. "It ties you into a reality" to see the design, rather than a drawing. "Once people see it going in the ground, they really grasp it and want it."

The city is working to create a 38-acre New Urbanism-style town center with retail, commercial, office, residential and cultural/civic uses.

Rodgers' design, which addresses everything from streetlighting and trash receptacles to benches, bicycle racks and tree grates, also will serve as an aesthetic reference. "It will create a playbook for every engineering firm" that works on the redevelopment project, Rodgers said.

"This is the very beginning of something wonderful, but a lot of details still have to be worked out."

Ralph Bosek, the city's community services director, said, "We wanted to get a look and feel we thought would be good for the community ... and to give the design team a running start.

"We wanted to build a small project first to make sure the guidelines work and to develop a learning curve for the big project to follow," Bosek said, adding that a design team could be hired as early as next month to flesh out the details of Rodgers' concept.

Allowing time to design the project and solicit bids, it is "a reasonable expectation" that a construction contract could be signed by Oct. 1, with construction requiring four to six months, he said.

Streets in the redevelopment area must be safe and pedestrian-friendly, but Rodgers strives to also make them attractive. Decorative pavers, treed medians and shrubs near the pavement edge are incorporated into her design. As president and owner of L.A. Design, Rodgers' lengthy list of projects includes many parks and streetscapes, her primary area of expertise during nearly 25 years of practice in Florida.

Plantings, especially oaks and other trees that provide shade, are an important element in creating a livable street and a unique character for the community, said Rodgers, who graduated from the University of Georgia in 1979 with a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture.

"We want to get that 'wow' effect," creating decorative gateway areas that let motorists and pedestrians know they have arrived in a different place, she said. "That's what I like about these projects: You can really make a difference."