

Council Candidates Field Questions At Forum

By **GEORGE WILKENS** The Tampa Tribune

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TEMPLE TERRACE - Each candidate for Temple Terrace City Council has the city's best interests at heart, one of them said during a political forum Tuesday night.

"They just want to go about it in different ways," Mark Knapp said.

For two hours, the six city council candidates offered two-minute responses to a seemingly endless barrage of wide-ranging questions, covering issues from bus service to dog parks.

The most ambitious project in the city's history - downtown redevelopment - was a primary topic at the forum sponsored by the Greater Temple Terrace Chamber of Commerce.

Knapp, a developer, said the city must "get out of the leasing business" and end its role as a landlord. "Now, we're sitting on \$20 million worth of properties" in the redevelopment district, centered on 35 acres southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street.

In response to a question about whether redevelopment can be accomplished without increasing taxes, Knapp said it cannot.

The three incumbents seeking re-election disagreed.

"As you all know, I am totally in favor of redevelopment," Ken Halloway said. A \$3 million grant, a \$13 million low-interest loan and creative financing will foot the bill, he said. "There is no plan to tax the citizens for this development, and there's no need to do so."

Incumbents Linda Shattles and Glenda Venable concurred.

Ken Tozier, a Temple Terrace businessman who ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 2002, said property owners already had an increase, as property taxes generated about an additional \$1 million for the city this year due to rising property values.

"I think we can do it without a tax increase," said Alison McGillivray Fernandez, a self-described fiscal conservative with a degree in accounting and finance. If elected, she said, one of her priorities would "be to get us out of property ownership in the redevelopment area."

Venable said the city purchased the property because "We wanted to control what went in there. We don't want to hold on to the land."

A question about Hillsborough Area Rapid Transit service in Temple Terrace, submitted by a member of the audience of about 200 people, produced mixed responses.

"I think we need public transportation," especially with rising fuel prices and increasing traffic, Halloway said.

Knapp, Temple Terrace's member on the HART board during one of his eight years as a councilman, called the bus service an "absolute waste of taxpayers' money."

Given the low ridership in Temple Terrace, Tozier said, annual city funding for county bus service is sufficient to lease a Honda Civic for each bus passenger.

Shattles said the city must continue to work with HART "until we can come up with a better plan."

In response to whether the city needs a dog park, all expressed interest, but said finding the right site is paramount.

Of the six candidates on the Nov. 7 ballot, voters will select three. Council members are paid \$200 monthly.