

Right Move, Wrong Time

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TEMPLE TERRACE - It could be the right move, but it was the wrong time to bring up downtown redevelopment for discussion.

That was the consensus of city council members during a special Oct. 14 meeting in which they represented themselves as the Temple Terrace Redevelopment Agency.

To their astonishment, the elected officials were shown site plans by the Vlass Group for a live, work and play environment at the site of two dilapidated strip centers southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street. Detailed renderings show a 500,000-square-foot project from Bullard Parkway to Riverhills Drive. The plan projects a heavy density of two- and three-story buildings containing shops, restaurants, residences and offices, none of which would abut 56th Street.

The Atlanta-based developer's plan took second place two years ago when the council chose Ram Development Co. and Pinnacle Realty Advisors as master developer for the city's downtown redevelopment project.

But following lengthy, unsuccessful negotiations between the city and Ram/Pinnacle, the would-be master developer terminated dealings with the city in early September.

As a result, the redevelopment agency met Sept. 12 and decided to ask city staff to research alternative approaches to fulfilling the community's longtime dream of revitalizing the city's downtown core. An Oct. 23 meeting was scheduled to discuss those options.

"The direction of the council was not this. At our last meeting we had we gave direct and clear direction to city staff to get together some recommendations on how we should move forward," said Councilman Mark Knapp. "I want to know who scheduled this meeting."

Mayor Joe Affronti confessed it was he who took the initiative to invite City Manager Kim Leinbach and Redevelopment Director Mike Marshall to join him on a trip to Atlanta to meet with Michael Vlass of the Vlass Group. He also asked Vlass to present his plan at the special meeting Affronti set up to coincide with the developer's appointments in Orlando the following day.

"I did it because I would like to get this thing going as soon as possible," Affronti said.

Knapp said he, too, likes the Vlass Group plan, but it is imperative to follow protocol to examine the city's options.

"If we move forward with the project you are obviously our first choice," Knapp told Vlass.

Councilman Ron Govin, who is campaigning for a second, four-year term on the council, agreed.

"I have no problem at all with your plan, but I have to do my due diligence and do what I feel is right and what our citizens want," he said.

The redevelopment agency voted to table the Vlass Group issue until the Oct. 23 meeting.