

# City Finds New Partner

By JOYCE McKENZIE

[jmckenzie@tampatrib.com](mailto:jmckenzie@tampatrib.com)

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TEMPLE TERRACE - City council members have decided to negotiate with an Atlanta-based company proposing to turn 500,000 acres of blighted shopping centers east of 56th Street from Bullard Parkway to Riverhills Drive into a live-work-play environment, with a main street as its focal point.

The Atlanta-based Vlass Group, in partnership with M.J. Lant Developments and Marketplace Advisors, was the second-ranked firm two years ago when Temple Terrace council members chose Ram Development Co. and Pinnacle Realty Advisors as its master developer for the city's downtown makeover.

After Ram/Pinnacle dropped out of the project in September due to sluggish market conditions, council members re-examined the Vlass Group's proposal, detailed earlier this month by Michael Vlass.

In addition, the council will study the city's financial feasibility of having the Vlass Group's plan become a reality

"He's already shown us his site plan; he's not going to be willing to change it significantly," said Councilman Mark Knapp. "It's going to be whether or not our city can afford his plan."

Notable projects developed by the team include Atlantic Station in Atlanta, Ga., and Altamonte Town Center in Altamonte.

Temple Terrace resident Richard Reina said he liked the plan when it first was unveiled in 2007. But he cautioned council members that give-and-take is important in any negotiation.

"Keep in mind it should be a shared burden on both sides," he said at an Oct. 23 council meeting. "Nothing good gets accomplished without some sacrifice."

Architect and Temple Terrace resident Grant Rimbey said the Vlass plan is what the community wants.

"It will create the rejuvenation our city needs and will create the sense of place our city needs," Rimbey said. "We would encourage the city to move forward in negotiations with the Vlass Group and Lant Developments, but this should have citizens' input. We must make this a partnership."

The city will hire an outside project manager to oversee the endeavor.

"I truly believe we need professional help instead of having a staff manager," said Councilman Ron Govin said. "I believe we would be well served if we had a project manager come on board immediately."

Councilman Frank Chillura concurred.

"We should all learn from some of the things we have done in the past," he said. "I want to show the developer we're not their hostage."

In addition, city council members want a Temple Terrace resident to take part in discussions with the developer. People interested in fulfilling that role may submit letters of interest to City Clerk Lisa Burns. In turn, the council will make the appointment.