

Task Force Working To Heal Divisions

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TEMPLE - TERRACE -- What was intended to be an organizational meeting of a newly formed residents committee on redevelopment could be marred by controversy as members face off with city leaders.

The resident-driven Redevelopment Task Force is scheduled to meet at 5 p.m. today in the city council workroom in Temple Terrace City Hall.

The task force formed Nov. 10 is made up of more than 20 residents, with various areas of professional expertise, interested in the future of redevelopment, said Patrick Finelli, the group's chairman.

"I started it, but I did it through conversations with the mayor and concerned citizens. With everyone's encouragement, we formed ourselves," Finelli said. "We are essentially activists who want to work for change. We say, 'Good things are coming, and we want to make sure it turns out the way we envisioned it.' "

The pro-redevelopment task force consists of focus groups targeting specific revitalization topics, including one centered on diplomacy toward residents who have opposed the city's plans. Some task force members also now appear at odds with city leaders.

When it comes to the city's vision for the revised redevelopment plan, some members of the task force expressed frustration about not being more involved in the wake of a failed Aug. 2 referendum to help fund the project.

Finelli said he hopes the task force will re-energize the redevelopment efforts and heal the divisions.

"We feel a good percentage of the voters who voted no voted that way not just because of taxes, but for other reasons," he said. "Yet the opposition was using it as, 'No, they don't want to do anything downtown.' We want to explore those other reasons and the divisions."

Some of those divisions materialized in the form of a letter this week from task force member Grant Rimbey, who also serves as president of Citizens for the Revitalization of Temple Terrace, to Mayor Joe Affronti. The contents are expected to be a part of the discussion at tonight's task force meeting, which Affronti said he will attend.

In the letter, Rimbey vented concerns about a lack of communication from Community Services Director Ralph Bosek, who he said was evasive. City spokeswoman Paula MacDonald said she is looking into the complaints and hopes to find a resolution. Bosek couldn't be reached for comment Monday.

"There is a growing sense that the redevelopment project is not 'ours' anymore, that city staff and public officials have taken it from the citizens and are making expeditious, uninformed back room decisions that largely benefit the developer," Rimbey wrote. "City staff seems to have excluded the most zealous supporters of redevelopment while appeasing the opposition."

In the letter, Rimbey accused the city of having a "current strategy of trying to get as much accomplished ... as possible before the opponents of redevelopment sweep the electoral field and stall the project."

Affronti expressed concerns about the task force being divided by controversy before it can get on track to help city government with redevelopment efforts.

"The meeting [tonight] was supposed to be set up so we can discuss how the committee could be more effective in accomplishing their objectives," he said. "This is a team effort, and if the team is divided it can't be effective."