

# A Vision Renewed

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TEMPLE TERRACE - It was the vision of wealthy Northerners, who wanted to build a city rich with civic spirit, a vibrant downtown and strong family values.

Some 80 years later, Temple Terrace has two out of three. Many of its 23,000 residents are active in local politics, churches and schools, and its tree-lined streets are home to some of the highest-priced real estate in Hillsborough County.

Yet the city has struggled to find an identity as repeated attempts to create a downtown have failed.

"When people think of Temple Terrace now, they think of Carrabba's and Burger King or all of the traffic along 56th Street and Busch Boulevard," said Ralph Bosek, the city's community services director. "We just want to build a core, someplace that can be the heart of Temple Terrace, and put a prettier and more interesting face on it."

On Thursday, the city embarks on its latest effort to do just that, when it unveils a redevelopment plan for Terrace Plaza Shopping Center and surrounding areas.

How Temple Terrace remakes itself may set the stage for other communities in the Tampa Bay area, said Ray Chiaramonte, assistant executive director of Hillsborough's City-County Planning Commission. The city's plan to use "new urbanism" design principles to incorporate shopping, entertainment and residential elements is in line with a national trend.

"Temple Terrace represents a certain period of development that's very common," he said. "It's a development from the 1950s, '60s and early '70s, and it is all over Hillsborough County. So I looked at it as a model for Town 'N Country, south Tampa, Brandon and other areas."

"We have a lot of these strip centers that have outlived their usefulness, in a sense. So they are going to get redeveloped and how are we going to do it, other than just putting a new canopy over it all?"

The design concept has been used to revive ailing shopping districts such as Fifth Avenue South in Naples and Main Street in Dunedin. It's the foundation of new developments such as West Park Village in West Tampa, the Garden District at Fishhawk Ranch in Lithia and Old Hyde Park Village in south Tampa.

## Chasing The Dream

Blighted Terrace Plaza, along 56th Street between Bullard Parkway and Riverhills Drive, didn't start out as an eyesore. In 1967, when the city experienced its biggest building boom since 1913, a \$730,000 shopping center was under construction. Terrace Plaza was billed as a destination that would give residents a place to buy necessities and luxuries and visit with neighbors. It was in line with the 1922 town plan.

Residents eventually got a shopping center in keeping with the times. The strip shopping center sits on land set aside in the plan for a downtown. The plan, now displayed in the Temple Terrace Public Library, is a reminder of the founders' intentions to have a place where people could shop, do government business, be entertained and live.

As the Great Depression stopped early development of the city, soaring inflation in the 1970s had the same effect. As traffic increased, 56th Street became a major thoroughfare that most residents viewed as a way to get from their homes in Temple Terrace to their jobs in Tampa, and the shopping center was a means to an end rather than a place to linger.

"If you look at the neighborhoods that are most desirable in most communities, you're going to find most were neighborhoods designed before [World War II]," Chiaramonte said. "It's almost like we've engineered

our cities to accommodate cars. You try walking along 56th Street. It's not a pleasant experience or someplace you want to stay."

A decade after Terrace Plaza was built, the dream of having a downtown was renewed. In 1977, then-Mayor Joe Bondi proposed building a civic center on the site, beautifying the shopping area and creating office space for civic groups. A year later, Bondi left office and the proposal was dropped.

The city did build a city hall with a police department on the third floor and a family recreation center, all outside the town center, during Bondi's tenure.

The current city government wants a new police station in the redevelopment area, despite some residents' protests about including government buildings. The city council has split on including a city hall or a performing arts center.

It also is grappling with how to include existing plaza tenants, such as Burger King, Kash 'n Karry and Regions Bank. Drive-up windows are something the city doesn't want, but some council members worry about pricing out lower- and middle-income families by doing away with fast food.

"We need to build a city for all," said Councilwoman Linda Shattles.

These days, Bondi, who is retired, is keeping a close watch on redevelopment plans. He is critical of the plan from Unicorp National Developments of Orlando that was released in July and had a \$300 million price tag.

The plan, created through a series of workshops in 2004, was shelved after a failed Aug. 2 bond referendum to pay the city's \$20 million share. The plan that will be presented Thursday is a scaled-down version, but no cost estimate has been released.

Voters' rejection of the referendum was disappointing, said Austin Simmons, vice president of retail development for Unicorp in Tampa. But the revised proposal, he said, although less grand, is viable.

In recent years, the city has spent nearly \$25 million buying property in the scaled-down redevelopment area. The loans come due in 2008. City leaders and some residents say it's time to face reality.

Bondi and others who voted against the referendum say the city has neglected other services in favor of revitalization.

"I say you need to redirect some of the tax dollars into stronger code enforcement and tougher police protection," Bondi said. "Unless they do something about the rest of the city, the only businesses we will have in the redevelopment area will be check-cashing stores, blood-selling stores and dollar stores."

## City Faces Change

Unlike the days when wealthy entrepreneurs lived in winter homes and spent their days golfing and hunting, today's Temple Terrace is home to varied socioeconomic classes, races and creeds.

It has one of the largest Muslim communities in the Tampa Bay area, estimated at 6,000 people, and many of those residents own businesses along 56th Street north of the redevelopment area.

Not everyone has embraced the changes in the city's makeup, and some fear the redevelopment will come at too great a cost.

"I'm not against poor people or low income. It's just that there are all of these other factors that we're not paying attention to," Bondi said. "Temple Terrace was always middle- to upper-income. Now we have

multifamilies living in apartments made for single families. We need to encourage high-income housing rather than low-income."

The revised redevelopment plan calls for building about 300 residences, many along the Hillsborough River, Simmons said. The city wants another developer to buy Doral Oaks, an aging apartment complex at Bullard Parkway and Sunnyside Road, and to convert it into upscale condominiums.

"If I build 300 residences, that's a big number for Temple Terrace. Those are going to be middle- to upper-income and probably will sell as soon as they're offered," Simmons said.

"There is an element there of 'not in my back yard.' I'm not going to pretend that it's easy. You are never completely able to integrate and we won't aim to do that with the architecture, but we will with the retail tenants."

Publicly, city leaders have said getting minority groups involved in the redevelopment effort is a priority. By all accounts, feelings are mixed about whether the message is reaching those groups.

"We have a great resource in our diversity," Bosek said. "I would love to see an upscale Middle Eastern restaurant in the redevelopment area. We have a major university nearby [University of South Florida], but we don't look like a college town. We aren't capitalizing on what we have here."

Bridging the gap with the Muslim community might be the biggest challenge.

"Traditionally, given the climate that we're in, Muslims are reluctant because they are concerned about how they will be perceived," said Ahmed Bedier, director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. "Different groups have different ways that you have to reach out to them. Not everybody reads the same publications or goes to the same meetings."

As the city moves forward with its plans, Bosek and the city council said there will be difficult choices. Regardless of whether they support or oppose the redevelopment, one thing is certain: Residents will be watching.