

New Redevelopment Plan To Be Unveiled

By CANDACE J. SAMOLINSKI csamolinski@tampatrib.com

Published: Dec 15, 2005

TEMPLE TERRACE - Residents will have a chance tonight to see if a developer lives up to the city's revised expectations for downtown redevelopment.

Unicorp National Developments of Orlando will unveil a scaled-down version of the original \$300 million plan during a meeting of the Temple Terrace City Council. The council received the proposal Monday for review and is expected to vote tonight whether to accept it or look for another developer.

"I think we have had enough meetings; it's time to do what we were elected to do and get on with it," Councilman Ken Halloway said at a Dec. 6 council meeting when discussions focused on whether to hold a series of public meetings after the unveiling to give residents a chance to critique the proposal. The city opted not to have additional town hall meetings on the subject.

The proposal is a smaller, less grand version that's in keeping with what residents told city leaders they wanted after a failed Aug. 2 bond referendum, said Austin Simmons, vice president of retail development for Unicorp in Tampa. The referendum would have funded some of the city's share of the mixed-use project southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street.

"It's a more cost-effective plan. We have only developed a plan for the north side [of the redevelopment area], so now it's half of the original site," he said. "Because of the financial position, it will not be of the design scope that we had originally planned."

Although the proposal is being presented, the city is far from ready to start construction. Financial analysis, a contract with a developer and negotiations with current tenants of Terrace Plaza and surrounding areas continue.

One major roadblock has been discussions with Kash n' Karry and Sweetbay Supermarkets, said Ralph Bosek, Temple Terrace community services director.

"Those talks delayed the plan," he said, "and nothing has been resolved."

Developing 'Main Street'

The city hopes to build a "Main Street" by extending Grove Hill Road through the area occupied by the Kash n' Karry and Masque Community Theatre. Those structures, along with the surrounding plazas, would be demolished to make way for a New Urbanism-style development that incorporates retail, restaurants and residential spaces.

At this point, there are too many unknowns for the company to commit to anything, said Nicole LeBeau, communications manager for Kash n' Karry and Sweetbay Supermarkets.

"The bottom line is, we would love to be involved in the new Temple Terrace plan, but it has to be one that is going to work for our Sweetbay corporate development plan," she said. "Currently, we have only seen concepts. We haven't seen any economic information, so at this point, we don't even know if it's viable for us. We have quite a few years left in our lease. There is a whole lot more we need to know."

The company doesn't plan to close the store, and all Kash n' Karry stores in the Tampa and St. Petersburg markets are scheduled to be converted to Sweetbay stores by the end of 2006, said Russ Lake, director of corporate development.

Bosek said Kash n' Karry doesn't have an "urban store model" that fits with the redevelopment vision.

LeBeau said the company is examining many store models. Lake said a decision whether to build a new store in Temple Terrace has more to do with finances.

"All of our capital resources are dedicated to rebranding this chain. It has nothing to do predominantly with it being a prototype or nonprototype facility," he said. "It really is: Can we fit and can we make the store a profitable part of the chain? We're absolutely in a collaborative mode."

Innovation can allow grocery stores and fast-food restaurants to fit into a New Urbanism-style development, said Ray Chiaramonte, assistant executive director of the Hillsborough City-County Planning Commission. Examples include a two-story Publix supermarket in the Winthrop Village Plaza on Providence Road in Brandon and a brick-facade McDonald's on 21st Street in Ybor City.

"I don't think it's become standard development practice, but I will tell you that more and more of the applications we are seeing are taking on these characteristics," he said. "There is no reason you couldn't have a lower-priced fast-food place that looked different. It might attract clientele that it doesn't attract now."

The city has been grappling with what to do with a Burger King restaurant in the redevelopment area. It was among the first 100 constructed by the company and is a top performer, according to company records. The problem is that the restaurant does about 80 percent of its business through the drive-up window - a feature that draws cars - and the city is trying to encourage foot traffic.

Financial Feasibility

Once the proposal is unveiled tonight, the city will begin talks about financial feasibility. The need to keep costs at a minimum was the message voters sent Aug. 2, after rejecting a bond referendum that would have raised taxes to pay the city's \$20 million portion of the redevelopment plan.

Financing a New Urbanism-style project can be difficult regardless of who will be paying the bills, Chiaramonte said.

"A big obstacle to New Urbanism is the banking and financing industry and developers because they are used to building things in a certain way," he said. "For example, most banks specialize in lending on a certain land use. Some lend for single-family subdivisions and some lend for commercial. But if somebody is building a mixed-use project, which of course this has to be, it doesn't fit the template for how things were done in the past."

If awarded the construction contract, Unicorp should not have trouble filling the retail shops or selling 300 proposed condominiums, Simmons said. However, the cost of the proposal has not been released.

"It certainly is about vision. If you are from out of town, it's understandable that someone would not get all excited when you look at that area and say, 'I have to do something here,' " he said. "What it takes is some knowledge of the retail market."

"You learn about the demographics. Certainly there is a lower socioeconomic and a higher socioeconomic class. The mix of those two provide for an interesting mix for the retailers. The products that they sell cater to a lot of people."

Once the revitalization effort breaks ground, the city may offer incentives to landlords of other plazas along 56th Street, west of the redevelopment district, to upgrade the buildings' facades to reflect the Mediterranean-style architecture planned for the new shopping district, Bosek said. The city is drafting an ordinance to establish design guidelines for new business and residential construction and improvements to keep architecture consistent with redevelopment.

"I think once this gets going, it will be a catalyst for other businesses to want to improve the outside of their buildings," he said. "It will be good for everyone."

Unicorp's revised plan is online at www.templeterrace.com/revitalize.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Unveiling of the Unicorp plan for revitalizing downtown Temple Terrace

WHEN: 7 p.m. today

WHERE: Omar K. Lightfoot Recreation Center, 10901 N. 56th St., Temple Terrace

INFORMATION: Call (813) 989-7105