

Council Supports Unicorp's Proposal



A view looking south on Broadway in Temple Terrace shows Unicorp's proposal for a new city hall.

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TEMPLE TERRACE - The vote is in and the clock is ticking on a redevelopment plan that supporters say has its best chance of succeeding in 2006.

The Temple Terrace City Council unanimously approved a proposal from Unicorp National Developments of Orlando during a meeting Thursday. About 100 residents turned out at the Omar K. Lightfoot Recreation Center, while others tuned in to watch the meeting on a Hillsborough County government channel.

Among those who urged the council to go forward was state Rep. Ed Homan, R-Temple Terrace. He said the city will be in a unique position in 2006 to get financial help from the state because of the power of Sens. Tom Lee, R-Brandon, and Victor Crist, R-Tampa. Lee will serve as Senate president when the Legislature convenes in the spring.

"I would certainly recommend to get it going while we have the clout we have in Tallahassee," he said.

Residents for and against the city's plans to redevelop the east side of 56th Street from Bullard Parkway to Riverhills Drive expressed concerns about a lack of detail in the proposal. However, Austin Simmons, Unicorp's vice president of retail development in Tampa, said the goal of this presentation was to show the developer is willing to follow a 21-point plan outlined by the council in September.

The council's guidelines were based on criticism and suggestions from residents following a failed Aug. 2 bond referendum to help fund the city's portion of the original \$300 million redevelopment plan. Unicorp also agreed Thursday to incorporate further recommendations from the city, including hiring architect David Kitchens, and changes suggested by consultant Neal Payton of the planning firm Torti Gallas.

"One of the goals tonight was to show the bones of the plan, but not the details," he said. "We have made the commitment to hire [the architectural firm] Cooper Carry, specifically David Kitchens, who is world-

renowned. When you see what we have presented tonight think, 'That's the body, but what is it going to wear?' David Kitchens will put the clothes on that body."

Simmons did shed light on some aspects of the proposal and said others need to be fleshed out.

He divided the project into Blocks A, B and C.

Block A, from Bullard Parkway to Chicago Avenue, is expected to have 30,000 square feet of retail space, 200 housing units and include at least one restaurant, Simmons said. Space will be set aside for a grocery store with the hope that Kash n' Karry/Sweetbay Supermarkets will agree to build there. If that happens, the store would share a rear loading dock with a new post office.

"We don't want to set expectations, but we hope [Friday] morning I can call the head real estate person at Kash n' Karry and say: 'It's time. Let's talk about how we are going to do this,' " Simmons said. The supermarket chain has not signed onto the project, citing concerns about a lack of details and a commitment from the city.

In Block B, from Chicago Avenue south to Riverhills Drive, Unicorp also offered solutions to the city's concerns about having drive-up windows within the redevelopment district. The block would have 22,500 square feet of retail space and 46,000 square feet of office space. It would include a 4,500-square-foot bank, likely Regions Bank; a fast-food restaurant, most likely Burger King; and a 300-space parking structure. Space between the parking structure and the building would accommodate the restaurant's drive-up window, and an exit onto 56th Street would serve as the bank drive-up.

The last phase of redevelopment plan is Block C, along the Hillsborough River. It calls for a total of 75 condominiums and town homes with 150 parking spaces, Simmons said. The two-story town homes would abut existing single-family homes, while three-story condos would be built along Riverhills Drive, and four-story units would be built along the river.