

Council Gives Planner More Time On Designs

By GEORGE WILKENS The Tampa Tribune

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TEMPLE TERRACE - A city council eager for a conceptual plan for downtown redevelopment and frustrated by repeated delays was divided Tuesday on granting the Pinnacle/Ram partnership more time to complete proposed designs.

Following a lengthy, often-impassioned discussion, council voted 3-2 to wait two more weeks for the plans.

Pinnacle Realty Advisors managing partner Skipper Peek repeatedly stressed that his team continues to make revisions requested by council.

"We've really been pedaling pretty hard to come up with something cost-effective," said Peek, the partnership's lead negotiator with the city. "We're working on several different renderings and a PowerPoint presentation."

Although Peek did not have the architectural renderings council expected, he said, "Certain aspects of the plan are very bold and very different." There have been no "wholesale changes" but a blending of common threads proposed by the city, the Redevelopment Task Force and Pinnacle/Ram, Peek said.

Two weeks will provide time for "10 versions of continually evolving plans &hellip to stop moving a bit" and be boiled down to two - one with and one without a cultural arts center, Peek said.

Both plans have the greater density council requested, though Peek could not quantify it.

The city strives to create a 35-acre New Urbanism-style development southeast of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway with retail, residential, office, restaurant, and cultural and civic components.

Peek was asked whether the plan will result in that desired pedestrian-friendly downtown.

"I think that is going to be in the eyes of each one of you," Peek replied. "In my eyes, it does."

Councilwoman Alison Fernandez said the city wants a town center, not just a shopping experience, and that some creative options remain unexplored.

"We're trying to come up with a plan that accomplishes the things you are looking for and at the same time does not saddle the city with something that becomes a liability," Peek said.

Peek said he expects the project will attract "nice casual dining" establishments that would draw from a 5-mile radius.

"I think we're drilling a dry hole, and it's time to call a stop to that and move on to the next developer," said Councilman Ken Halloway.

Mayor Joe Affronti suggested similar action. "We're no further today than we were four weeks ago. It seems you would have something conceptual to show us what the changes are going to be," he told Peek.

Councilman Frank Chillura was vocal in his support of Peek. "We have someone busting their butt trying to put a plan before us," he said. Categorizing some of the comments as "a slap in the face" to Peek, Chillura said, "I would not blame that man if he got up and said, 'The hell with this.' "

The plan is being altered as requested and progressing, Chillura said. "There is movement, people."

The majority agreed to have Peek and city staff meet next week and have the final plan at the March 20 council meeting.

Halloway and Fernandez cast the no votes.