

Arts Center Vote Postponed

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TEMPLE TERRACE - In Councilman Ron Govin's judgment, Temple Terrace was considering putting the cart before the horse.

In response, during a special meeting Tuesday, the city council postponed a vote on proceeding with plans presented by Collman Karsky/Toppe Architects to build a community arts and education center in the city's redevelopment area southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street.

Instead, the council unanimously requested detailed interior and exterior renderings of the project from the architects, rather than giving them approval to move forward with their design plans.

Architect planner John Toppe said the center's design is based on a compilation of recommendations gathered from close to 200 community members by his firm in a 2005 needs assessment study.

The architects' conceptual building plan includes a lobby, an art gallery, a multipurpose theater/conference center, spaces for visual and performing arts programs, a chamber of commerce suite, and administrative and support staff offices.

Toppe said the multipurpose theater could be equipped to handle city council and other city-based meetings, freeing up space in city hall. Also, by moving the Mothers Against Drunk Driving office and a ceramics studio from city hall's first floor to spaces in the projected center, close to 4,050 square feet would be open for the current second-floor departments that generate walk-in traffic.

In the same way, an estimated 2,500 square feet in the Temple Terrace Family Recreation Complex and 2,500 square feet in the Omar K. Lightfoot Recreation Center would become available if some of their programs were moved to the arts and education center.

The cost to the city for the drawings, according to City Manager Kim Leinbach, is \$108,000. If the city were to approve the complete design package from Collman Karsky/Toppe, the cost would be \$481,860.

The decision was made in an effort to solicit \$2 million in corporate donations and \$2.16 million in community contributions essential to funding the projected 21,992-square-foot center. The city's \$500,000 loan to purchase the land from developer Ram Development Co. and Pinnacle Realty Advisors and \$2.5 million in community investment tax revenue are expected to cover the difference in the project's estimated \$7.16 million capital expense costs.

"We need the design to get the pledges. That's just the way it is," said Govin, noting he is confident it is doable with Temple Terrace activist Mel Jurado, who has offered to head the project's capital campaign, at the helm. "If anybody knows her, they know she is dynamic."

Councilman Ken Halloway is in favor of the project, provided the needed money can be raised.

"It's a good investment if we can keep it rolling," he said. "I think it's a capstone to a vital community."

Councilman Frank Chillura also likes the idea but is hesitant to support the center unless he is confident the community will support its fundraising effort.

"I want to know everything upfront," he said. "These issues need to be more fine-tuned and I don't think there is any rush."

Leinbach said the city has one year from when the sales and purchase agreement with Ram/Pinnacle is signed to decide on the issue.

"If we buy the land and this doesn't materialize, we can sell the land back to the developer," he said.

Mayor Joe Affronti hopes the city will be able to see the center to fruition.

"There is a tremendous market out there. I think it's incumbent upon us to embrace it," he said. "New Tampa doesn't have anything like this." Toppe estimated a turnaround time of 30 to 90 days for detailed renderings of the center's design.