

Temple Terrace Should Stick To Its Vision

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The saga of Temple Terrace's redevelopment effort has lasted so long that frustrated leaders may be tempted to accept something less than the goal envisioned by citizens: a unique downtown where people can live, work and play.

With a defining vote scheduled for Tuesday, council members should stay true to their New Urbanism dream and reject plans to make downtown little more than a gussied-up strip mall.

The Pinnacle/Ram partnership wants to convert a 35-acre dilapidated shopping center into a new downtown, but the plan falls woefully short of what citizens said they wanted. And it's troubling to know that the city's redevelopment director, Ralph Bosek, has privately panned the proposal yet said nothing as council mulled the details.

When Temple Terrace residents set out to remake their downtown, they envisioned a city center where people could live, walk to work, enjoy the arts and interact with one another in parks and public squares.

However, the initial Pinnacle/Ram plan shows vast sections devoted to parking lots and few residences built on what is expected to become Temple Terrace's main street. Other than some attractive landscaping and exterior remodeling, the new downtown would essentially be a strip shopping center.

For years Temple Terrace has been acquiring land to create a public-private development that included a vibrant city square. But little in the Pinnacle/Ram proposal meets the expectations of citizens who participated in the redevelopment planning.

Talks are underway to downsize the parking lots and add more buildings. Hope exists that a compromise will emerge. Regardless, the city would be wise to retain ownership of about one-third of the southern acreage to ensure a defining, enduring community centerpiece is built.

There seems to be no appreciation at City Hall for how a unique downtown could feed off the visionary growth occurring just a few miles away at the University of South Florida, where just last week a deal was signed to build a major biotech partnership between the Moffitt Cancer Center and the pharmaceutical giant Merck. Another biotech deal between USF and BioVest International also is underway. And the landmark Patel Center for Global Solutions is under construction.

These projects started with a vision and are becoming a reality.

Temple Terrace is a natural bedroom community for the innovation arising around USF, but the city must find the fortitude to pursue its vision. Unless a significant change is made in this development proposal so that it reflects new urbanist ideals, the council should vote it down.