

Redevelopment Snags

By JOYCE McKENZIE

The Tampa Tribune

Published: March 22, 2008

TEMPLE TERRACE The city council's expected vote Tuesday regarding the price and purchase parameters for the city's downtown redevelopment project was postponed until further notice.

The decision was made when representatives from Ram Development Co. and Pinnacle Realty Advisors, development partners in revitalizing two rundown shopping centers southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street, opted not to attend a workshop prior to the city council meeting.

Instead, the developers met in private to discuss moving forward with the March 31 deadline on a sales and purchase agreement, a key element to starting the project.

Councilman Ron Govin, who represents the council in redevelopment-related meetings between city staff and the developer partners, said there are four or five issues that need to be settled between the two parties to "seal the deal."

"They have to decide whether they feel the investment is worth going ahead with it," said Govin, who indicated he has been in frequent contact with Ram/Pinnacle. "I would say they are still very positive and still want to go forward."

One of City Attorney Mark Connolly's major concerns is Ram/Pinnacle's desire to have the option of requiring the city to return the already-agreed-upon \$400,000 escrow deposit for the \$14.9 million purchase of the 17.89-acre site should the development partners decide to cancel the agreement.

"They have put it in a default agreement that appears to be the biggest hurdle we have to deal with," Connolly said.

He said Ram/Pinnacle's contention is that it already will have spent a large sum of money before the July 1 closing date.

"I told them the city is also spending a lot of money, including putting in underground utilities at a cost of close to \$1 million dollars that ultimately will benefit them," Connolly said.

Govin said Ram/Pinnacle's concern is that the city could scrap the project at the "eleventh hour" and it contends that the clause would help ease the blow.

"But I think we should push for equality. What's good for the goose is good for the gander," he said.

Attorneys for both sides will meet with city staff to discuss the issue in conjunction with several others March 25. Council hopes to reach a decision on the agreement before its April 1 meeting.