

Revitalization Efforts Hit A Snag

By CANDACE J. SAMOLINSKI csamolinski@tampatrib.com

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A local lawyer is the first landowner to challenge Temple Terrace's efforts to encourage planned development in its revitalization area.

Jack Townsend purchased the former Prevatt CE Funeral Home, 9750 N. 56th St., for \$880,000 in June, according to county property records. The property, which is less than an acre, is zoned as "commercial office." Townsend wants the city to rezone the property to "commercial general," which would expand its possible uses.

Townsend said he has been approached by companies interested in developing the property. He has considered moving his law practice to the site, as well as selling the land for projects including a bank, which is not allowed under the current zoning.

He submitted the rezoning application in January, and the matter came before the Temple Terrace City Council on Tuesday.

The discussion highlighted the challenges the city council will face on land issues, including zoning and aesthetic restrictions, in the coming months. The city council has the final word on projects and is the only body that can issue a hardship variance.

In the summer, the city took steps to ensure development or substantial renovation of properties within its community redevelopment area, a 225-acre tract along North 56th Street, would fall in line with Temple Terrace's vision of a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly downtown.

To accomplish that, the land-use designation of all 225 acres was changed to "designated mixed use." The zoning was limited to "planned development" for properties 2 acres and larger. In February, the city agreed to change that to 1 acre to accommodate owners of smaller parcels, with the intention of encouraging them to buy adjacent properties and create larger-scale projects.

At the time, Redevelopment Director Ralph Bosek cautioned city council members that there are several properties smaller than 1 acre within the CRA. To allow property owners to move ahead with their projects, the city created a hardship process through which landowners could request a variance.

"We are not seeking to force anyone to rezone, but we are trying to encourage aggregation of properties," Bosek said Tuesday. "We have found that large pieces of property tend to be better suited for mixed-use projects."

When Townsend appeared before the council Tuesday, he expressed no interest in seeking a hardship variance, which would rezone his property to "planned development" and not the "commercial general" he wants. He also expressed no interest aggregating his property with surrounding parcels, which include the former post office.

He told council members the process has tied his hands and prevented him from pursuing viable projects for the 7,000-square-foot building.

"There are landowners who, like me, cannot expand their boundaries," he said. "I'm a landowner who will never qualify for [planned development zoning] unless I want to be beholden to the man who owns the post office next door."

The Temple Terrace Community Services Department and the Hillsborough City-County Planning Commission recommended denying Townsend's rezoning application. Planners from each agency cited inconsistencies with the city's comprehensive plan and its vision for redevelopment, among other concerns.

The council postponed a decision on the rezoning application until June 20. Council members expressed concerns about tying the hands of landowners, but Bosek said the only way to address the issue beyond a hardship variance is to amend the city's comprehensive plan.

"There are other properties that are going to fall into this category," said Councilwoman Linda Shattles. "Out of fairness to other landowners, I think we should be careful how we proceed here."