

Update Presented On Redevelopment

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TEMPLE TERRACE - Months of negotiating with prospective tenants about redevelopment plans have prompted a developer to retool a proposal presented in December.

About 55 residents came to the Temple Terrace Public Library on Monday night for a town hall meeting. Lee J. Maher, co-owner of Unicorp National Developments of Orlando, gave residents and city staff a brief update on redevelopment.

Unicorp is the developer interested in transforming the area along 56th Street from Bullard Parkway to the Hillsborough River into a New Urbanist-style community of residences, businesses and retail shopping.

In December, the city council approved the firm's revised plan for the area, but a contract has not been reached because the process has stalled. The primary reason has been protracted negotiations with Kash n' Karry/Sweetbay Supermarkets. Unicorp's original \$300 million plan, which was presented last summer, was reworked in the wake of a failed Aug. 2 bond referendum to help pay for the city's share of infrastructure.

"I know there has been a little bit of a delay, which is partly our fault, and for that we apologize," Maher told the crowd. "There also has been a rumor out there that Unicorp is no longer interested in the project. I am here to dispel that."

Maher could not dispel the fact that an inability to reach a deal with Sweetbay has forced the company to shift gears and compromise. Russ Lake with Sweetbay previously expressed concerns that Unicorp's proposal was too restrictive on parking and might alienate customers who would drive to the store. One goal of the redevelopment area is to make the area along 56th Street more pedestrian-friendly.

Sweetbay has a 17-year lease in its current location, which sits in the spot where the city had hoped to build a Main Street. Maher revealed few details about what Unicorp hopes to do to accommodate the grocery store, but he did express hope that the latest version of the plan presented in December will meet with most everyone's approval.

"We have tweaked and reworked the site plan," he said. "I think we will be ready on Wednesday and Thursday to present the final drawings. It's going very well."

"This turned out to be a lengthy project, but we are on the 5-yard line and we're ready to run the football in."

City Manager Kim Leinbach said the city is more than "ready for a touchdown."

At a goal-setting session earlier this month, city council members told Leinbach it was time to move forward with redevelopment, with or without Sweetbay.

Resident Judson Aspray, who attended the meeting, said he was glad to learn more about the Sweetbay situation.

"I would be glad to have their store in the redevelopment," he said. "I was just concerned because I had heard it was holding up the deal."

While waiting for a deal to be reached, Leinbach, Community Services Director Ralph Bosek and Mayor Joe Affronti have been seeking ways to pay for redevelopment once it does happen.

Bosek announced during the meeting that the city has secured \$3.75 million in grants and is eligible for \$13 million in federal loan guarantees.

"If you add that all up, it's almost as much as the bond referendum," Bosek said.

As the meeting continued, other residents raised concerns about the quality of education in Temple Terrace, which has been a priority for Affronti. The city is in the process of preparing a questionnaire for residents, Affronti said. The issue will be discussed at a council workshop May 16.

"We want to ask parents what they want and what they like," he said. "We want to know what they would want in order to send their kids to schools in Temple Terrace."

Other topics of concern raised by residents included hurricane preparedness.

Fire Chief Ernie Hiers said all city buildings with windows on the first floor are equipped with hurricane-resistant window film. Resident Ken Tozier questioned whether the city hall is outfitted with hurricane shutters or other preventive measures.

Leinbach said an engineer has advised the city that it's cheaper to build a new city hall than to retrofit the existing one.