

Council OKs builder's terms

By JOYCE McKENZIE

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Mayor Joe Affronti said he hopes city council's recent action set the stage for a long awaited new urbanism-style town center.

Following a lengthy meeting on May 12, council members voted to accept a developer's basic terms and parameters for the makeover of two blighted shopping plazas south of Bullard Parkway and east of 56th Street, a vision that has been in the works for nearly a decade.

The city would convey ownership of about 29 acres to the master developer - the Atlanta-based Vlass Group, in partnership with MJ Lant Developments and Marketplace Advisors - under terms of an agreement that leaders hope to have in place within 30 days.

The town center plans call for a pedestrian-friendly mix of stores, restaurants, offices, housing and civic buildings. It might include an arts education center and a new library; projects that, if approved, would be a joint venture between the developer and the city. The development would be configured around a main street, a public roadway owned by the city.

"If it all comes together it will have a tremendous impact on our citizens' quality of life," Affronti said.

If city council approves the arrangement, the Vlass Group will have two years to submit a site plan for the first phase of the three-stage project. Construction must begin within three years and be completed within two years. The developer must start the next phase within two years and complete it within two years.

The entire project is slated to be completed within 13 years.

Councilman Ken Halloway was the first to express enthusiasm for the developer's plan.

The developer's agreement proposal "is an excellent document," he said. "My biggest problem with this agreement initially was that Vlass could acquire this property at no cost and sit on it a couple of years, then sell it. That's not going to happen."

Councilwoman Alison Fernandez concurred.

"I do think there are some minor issues that need to be worked out, but it's in the city's best interest to move forward," she said.

Ron Govin was the only council member who voted against accepting the basics of the

developer's redevelopment proposal: "I was presented with this information at 11 a.m. yesterday and I was unable to consume all that was presented in such a short length of time."