

Council Approves Chillura Project

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TEMPLE TERRACE - A councilman is opening his family's checkbook to make good on a promise to promote the city's redevelopment vision.

It's been about a year since the city paid \$1.2 million to buy Beacon Plaza, a 10,000-square-foot office complex at Bullard Parkway and 56th Street, from Councilman Frank Chillura's family's business. He said he sold under threat of condemnation. The company, LaBeacon Plaza, then spent \$247,740 from the proceeds to buy a 29,400-square-foot property along 56th Street, north of Temple Heights Road and east of Beverly Drive, according to property records.

At Tuesday's meeting of the Temple Terrace City Council, a rendering was unveiled for two one-story office buildings to be built on the site. The project, Terrace Piazza, is one of the most grand commercial design proposals so far in the city's 225-acre community redevelopment area, or CRA.

It's expected to be the first to begin generating property taxes to help pay for redevelopment, and it also will give the city a chance to launch a pilot program for its proposed streetscaping project, city leaders said.

The design embodies the city's proposed guidelines for shaping architecture in the CRA. The guidelines are expected to be adopted at a city council meeting May 16.

"This is an excellent example of the quality and type of project that we want to see in the CRA," said Community Services Director Ralph Bosek. "We are really taking a significant step here."

The project has Mediterranean Revival-style architecture with a rich color palette taken from a list of city-approved colors. The exterior will be a stucco finish, and the buildings will have barrel-tile roofs. Decorative metal fencing will help camouflage two retention ponds to be installed on the property, Chillura told the council. It also will include two 35-foot decorative columns.

"It's going to cost me more, but I think it's a good start for the city's revitalization efforts," Chillura said. "You have to do what you believe in, and I believe in Temple Terrace."

Weather permitting, the project could break ground by the end of summer, Chillura said. Construction costs for the parking lot are going to be higher this year, said Chillura, who completed a similar project two years ago. He attributed it to rising petroleum prices. Demand for construction materials also is driving up prices.

"I was talking with someone about the roof tiles, and he told me I would need to order those six months in advance," Chillura said. "There's a lot of demand."

The city council, with Chillura abstaining from the vote, unanimously approved the project Tuesday.

The approval includes recommendations from city staff to grant three waivers for the property: The retention ponds will be allowed to use the fences rather than landscaping to act as a buffer, landscaping and a buffer wall will not have to be installed at the rear of the property in order to create an urban streetscape on the east side of Beverly Drive, and landscape buffers also will not be required along the side parking lots in order to provide future access through the parking lots of adjacent properties.

Terrace Piazza will be the first development to begin generating property tax revenue for the city using its tax incremental financing, or TIF, agreement with the county.

The Florida Legislature established the TIF procedure in 1969, when the state adopted the Community Redevelopment Act. It is one way for communities to pay to improve blighted or underused properties within a defined area. As properties within the TIF area are developed and improved, their taxable values rise.

The difference between the baseline property value and that increase - known as a tax increment - is deposited into a trust fund and earmarked to pay for the city's share of improvements in the TIF area, either by paying off loans or bonds, or simply to pay out-of-pocket expenses. Over time, Temple Terrace's elected leaders hope the TIF funds will add up to millions of dollars.

Temple Terrace's 30-year agreement allows 100 percent of city and county tax increments paid by property owners in the redevelopment area to be deposited into the city's Redevelopment Trust Fund during the first 10 years. The amount drops to 80 percent for the next 20 years, with 20 percent being retained by the county.