

# More Compromise For Redevelopment

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TEMPLE TERRACE - Dreams of contiguous two-story buildings in a downtown core along 56th Street have all but disappeared as the city prepares again to compromise its redevelopment plan.

In 1999, the city set out to revitalize its core by creating the Community Redevelopment Agency to oversee a 225-acre district where businesses and residences could thrive. The city wanted to lead the way by targeting Terrace Plaza, a blighted shopping center at 56th Street and Bullard Parkway. It ultimately spent about \$22 million to purchase 34 of 38 acres that include the shopping center and surrounding areas. The loans come due in 2008.

Urban planners then spent countless hours with thousands of residents to develop a vision for what downtown redevelopment should look like. The result from Unicorp National Developments of Orlando was a New Urbanist community with Mediterranean-style architecture where people could live, work and gather for shopping, culture and entertainment. The proposal was to have multistory buildings with large windows about 10 feet off 56th Street in order to create a continuous feeling of a pedestrian-friendly community. The initial project's budget swelled to \$300 million. When asked to approve a bond referendum Aug. 2 to help pay for infrastructure, voters rejected the idea.

In December, Unicorp presented a scaled-down version to be completed in two phases. It still embodied the feeling and character of the grand plan and retained the storefronts that planners said would help calm traffic on busy 56th Street. The Temple Terrace City Council approved the project and told Unicorp to get to work. The project hit a snag in January when existing tenants in the area balked at where their businesses would be relocated on the site.

On Tuesday, a visibly frustrated city council viewed Unicorp's latest version of the downtown redevelopment plan, which is intended to find middle ground. The street-lining storefronts have vanished from the first phase of the project and given way to a well-landscaped but boxy supermarket, a frontage parking lot and an existing fast-food restaurant with a drive-through window. A Starbucks store and a relocated Regions Bank were the only additions to the previous plan.

The council's frustration was rooted in the realization that the city is at the mercy of Kash n' Karry/Sweetbay Supermarkets, which has a store in the redevelopment area that city officials want to relocate.

"I am very uncomfortable with the Sweetbay situation. Unicorp represented to us, more than a year ago, that the tenants were the least of their worries. The city has been negotiating and negotiating with Kash n' Karry, and there are no commitments," Councilman Frank Chillura said. "Unicorp stepped up to the plate. They said the first quarter of the year we would have a plan and numbers. We now have a partial plan and no numbers."

For some members, frustration gave way to acceptance.

"I can't say I am in love with this plan, but I can live with this plan," said Councilman Ken Halloway. "I would like to know before I vote on this plan whether Sweetbay agrees with this."

The city may have no choice.

"This is the best chance we have had of moving forward in 2 1/2 years," said Community Services Director Ralph Bosek. "Right now, their 38-year lease not only controls the store, but all three parcels and the contiguous parking. One of the deal breakers for the city is that [Kash n' Karry] has to relinquish their lease."

Another lease with Burger King also likely means the fast-food staple will remain at the corner at 56th Street and Bullard Parkway for another seven years, Bosek said.

Council members said they are less concerned with the hamburger chain than with Sweetbay's apparent ability to control the project.

"How much of a problem is [Sweetbay] going to be throughout this process?" Councilwoman Glenda Venable said. "What if we get to the point where we have spent all of this money and they aren't onboard?"

Bosek reassured the council Unicorp has faith that this latest plan will be acceptable to the grocery store chain.

The next step is for city and Unicorp officials to meet with Sweetbay to gain approval of the plan.

Council members made it clear to Bosek and City Manager Kim Leinbach that they expect a firm commitment from Sweetbay before being asked to approve the plan. Once approved, the plan will undergo a financial analysis and be submitted to an architect to flesh out the details.

The city hopes to have the project ready to break ground by the end of the year, as Leinbach said previously.

Mayor Joe Affronti said Unicorp's financial investment in the project should be incentive enough to persuade Sweetbay to get onboard. However, city and Unicorp officials have had a dozen meetings with the company this year, and none has produced a commitment, Bosek said.

Leinbach said that even though Unicorp, which is working without a contract from the city, is negotiating the deal, the city will be watching.

"We will be looking over their shoulder," he said.

If Sweetbay officials approve the proposed plan, a special meeting of the city council could be called within a week to discuss the project.

Sweetbay officials did not return calls seeking comment.