

Town Center Workshops Start Monday

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TEMPLE TERRACE - The planning process for Temple Terrace's town center project will shift into high gear next week.

A weeklong series of charettes, or interactive public workshops, begins Monday with a kickoff presentation by Torti Gallas and Partners, the city's planning firm. Doors open at 3 p.m. for an open house, with the presentation at 7 p.m.

All meetings will be inside a storefront at Kash n' Karry Plaza, 8825 N. 56th St.

Torti Gallas principal Neal Payton will address many of the concepts generated at a public workshop May 15, when a couple of hundred residents marked up maps, erected imaginary buildings and brainstormed a multitude of ideas.

More than 20 plans were crafted that day; those will be whittled down to perhaps four or five, officials say, and eventually one master plan. Although the 207-acre redevelopment project includes residential and commercial areas, the initial focus is southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street, where the city intends to build a modern town center. The area is the site of two dilapidated shopping centers.

An upscale restaurant, a movie theater, a skateboard park, a bookstore and a courtyard were among the more common suggestions, said Redevelopment Director Ralph Bosek.

Other ideas were more ambitious, including a scenic waterway winding through the heart of the development.

"I don't think I've ever seen a more motivated, focused group of citizens in my lifetime," Bosek said. "I was impressed with people's creativity and with their work ethic. They really threw themselves at this. I think history was made that day."

Planners Will Work With Public

Next week, residents will have a chance to work one-on-one with planners, adding depth to their ideas and scrutinizing them with professionals, Bosek said.

"The citizens that come in will be able to see what we've done in the last month and try to improve on those schemes," he said. "Certainly, we don't have all the answers yet, but we're starting to understand what citizens would like to see in terms of the development."

Businessman David Long said the May workshop opened his eyes to a tantalizing array of possibilities.

"It was very positive," he said. "I liked the idea of no-holds-barred, just brainstorming and coming up with ideas, and we'll see what's feasible and what isn't. I've never been involved in something like this before where the community is actually encouraged to give their input."

Along with the charettes, nightly presentations will address specific topics, such as waterfront development and how to handle 56th Street. Meetings also will be held with developers, utility companies, postal officials and other parties whose input is needed.

"The idea is, while we're in the planning phases, to seek the advice of people who are in the business, who are building projects, to ask them, 'What do y'all think?' So, I think it will be a mutual learning experience," Bosek said.

Long said participation is crucial to the project's success.

“I think it's absolutely essential to have the public participate rather than have the city just say, ‘Well, this what we're going to do,’ ” he said. “The more citizens participate in this, the more of a sense of ownership they're going to have, and the more they're likely to support whatever goes in there.”

Anticipation Seems To Be Growing

Resident Al Platt, a member of the Strategic Teamwork and Redevelopment citizens advisory committee, agreed.

“The thing I am looking forward to is getting rid of that horrible eyesore and putting in its place something of functional beauty that will enhance the city of Temple Terrace,” he said. “Whatever happens, whatever the design is, it must be something that is accepted by the citizens. By their participation in it, that's going to happen.”

Platt said excitement about the project appears to be growing.

“When the first bulldozer is rolled onto that property, the excitement of the people is going to escalate astronomically,” he said. “People will realize it's for real, it's really going to happen in my lifetime. It's going to be like a new beginning for Temple Terrace.”

Next week's events will conclude June 19 with a wrap-up presentation at 11 a.m. Torti Gallas officials will discuss what they have learned from residents and share some of their own ideas for the project.

From there, Bosek said, they will begin crafting the master redevelopment plan. A draft of the plan is scheduled for review in mid-September, with final approval slated for January.