

City, councilman at odds over redevelopment path

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TEMPLE TERRACE -- The City of Temple Terrace wants to redevelop 35 acres near downtown to create a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood, but the property owned by a city councilman's family may stand in the way.

This city of approximately 20,000 people is viewed as a snapshot of urban sprawl. Officials want to change that perception and recreate a downtown that attracts and keeps people.

It is acquiring property in a southeast quadrant of East Bullard Parkway and East 56th Street, an area labeled its redevelopment project area. Councilman Frank Chillura's family owns one of these parcels, La Beacon Plaza on East Bullard, but has been unwilling to sell it for years.

The city on May 18 offered to purchase the two-building commercial property for \$750,000 - \$300,000 more than what was determined to be fair market value -- and is giving Chillura a minimum of 90 days to respond, said Ralph Bosek, director of the city's Redevelopment Agency. But based on prior overtures from the city to acquire the property and subsequent rejections from the family, Temple Terrace might have to use its power of eminent domain to secure it, he said.

"That property is front-row center in our project area," said Bosek. "We've already spent \$16 million on other properties, and we're going to make this thing happen."

On May 28, the city closed on a \$2.46-million purchase at 8635 N. 56th St. Bosek said he expects to close June 4 on another parcel, the vacant Havana Palms restaurant at 8615 N. 56th St., for \$1.02 million.

Chillura has abstained from voting on the council's proposal to purchase his family's property. He has voted in favor of acquiring the other properties.

A redevelopment proposal could come in a number of different forms and affect a number of different areas, not just the southeast quadrant, Chillura said.

"Everyone has their own vision of what the area should be," said Chillura. "Some want waterfront, and some want other things. We're still in the early stages of the charrette process, but this is going to be a decision on what the community wants not what the council wants."

The charrette process was launched in May and runs through June. A charrette involves numerous community meetings designed to get government officials, residents and developers together to map out a redevelopment plan. Once that input is collected, the urban planning firm Torti Gallas and Partners will compile it and submit it to the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Council for consideration by Oct. 15.

Christopher Atkinson, project manager with Torti Gallas, said the charrettes are designed to limit challenges of total redevelopment by bringing all those involved in the process to the table.

"This helps bang out some of the issues and bang out a plan for the direction of Temple Terrace," said Atkinson. "It is designed to mitigate issues that otherwise might arise."

However, the one issue that won't go away is that Chillura's property lies within the area Torti Gallas was directed to plan redevelopment.

"We were told to look at southeast quadrant of East Bullard Parkway and East 56th Street," said Atkinson. "That area has been the sole focus."

Meanwhile, the city plans to bring developers in to scout the 35-acre site as early as June 12, regardless of whether it yet owns all the property.

"We think this is going to be a unique development that could have a value in excess of \$100 million," Bosek said. "We want to create a streetscape that attracts people to our downtown, with restaurants, shops, parks and parking garages. We're bringing in developers to give us a dose of reality."