

Plan Is To Save The Land

By JOYCE McKENZIE, The Tampa Tribune

Published: July 7, 2007

TEMPLE TERRACE - In fall 2005, Temple Terrace residents had the opportunity to weigh in on the issue of a Wal-Mart Supercenter along Temple Terrace Highway.

'We didn't need it, and we didn't want it. ... No roads could have handled that amount of traffic,' said longtime resident Bill Smalley.

Another concern was the effect the Wal-Mart store would have on the environment. The site outside Temple Terrace, abutting 78th Street to the east and Harney Road on the south, has wetlands, longleaf pines, hardwood hammocks and bird nesting trees.

'I've walked back there many times, and I've seen owls back there, I've seen osprey back there, and I've seen red-shouldered hawks,' Smalley said. 'What's important is that we don't have a 4,000-unit condo development or a black-topped Wal-Mart parking lot on that very pristine site.'

In fact, Smalley absolutely detests the idea of 'paving over paradise.'

In January 2006, Wal-Mart withdrew its application to rezone 34.9 acres of the 100-acre tract.

Smalley then jumped on the bandwagon along with several others when Temple Terrace resident Yolanda Clifton proposed nominating the entire 100 acres for acquisition by the Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program, a Hillsborough County program that purchases sensitive land to protect it from development.

Grant Rimbey, immediate past president of the Temple Terrace Preservation Society and president of Citizens for the Revitalization of Temple Terrace, offered to fill out the site nomination on the acreage owned by the Doris Harvey estate and valued at \$2.5 million.

'I'm an architect, and I think we need some green space in between all the development, and there are few forested, large tracts in our area that are owned by one person,' said Rimbey, who'd like to see the property turned into a passive park. 'The land currently has a population of gopher tortoises on part of the site, and wetlands are present on other portions of the site.'

Considered for ELAPP acquisition is land that is environmentally unique, irreplaceable and valued for its ecological resources. If selected, it must be open to the public.

The qualifying criteria include having land that contains relatively unaltered flora and fauna; provides habitat for threatened plants and animals; has an outstanding or unusual geological feature; protects water quality; and contains archaeological sites.

'They don't have to meet all the standards,' said John Brill, Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department spokesman.

The Doris Harvey site, along with seven other properties nominated for 2007 ELAPP acquisition, will be voted on July 16 by a site review committee composed of laymen and county and state environmental specialists.

'They then rank them and try to get to the top-ranked first,' Brill said. 'However, they do not negotiate the price of the land; that's done through our real estate department.'

Approved by county voters in 1990, ELAPP is funded through property taxes. The program spends \$5 million to \$15 million annually to buy land, with the approval of county commissioners.

In 2004, eight sites were nominated for ELAPP use, and none qualified. In 2005, there were six nominations, and one was approved.

'It's organizations like ELAPP that stop the blacktop from covering all of nature's beautiful creations, and we're fortunate to have much of Temple Terrace preserved by ELAPP,' Smalley said.

Temple Terrace City Councilman Frank Chillura concurred.

'It would be nice to preserve the property in its natural state, so you don't see asphalt all over the place,' he said. 'It would also put a lot of people at ease who didn't want the Wal-Mart there and to know as well they won't have to deal with the traffic created by Wal-Mart or any other big development on that property.'