

Masque Plays For Home

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TEMPLE TERRACE - TEMPLE TERRACE - Masque Community Theatre is a perfect example of how a venue of its type should serve its neighbors, Cyn LoPinto says.

"We are a family of families with the common goal of being able to provide a place for children to express themselves while being exposed to all aspects of performing arts," said LoPinto, the wife of Masque President Joe LoPinto and mother of two children who have been involved in its productions.

She and other Masque advocates are disappointed that they will soon have to give up their building in the redevelopment area southeast of Bullard Parkway and 56th Street, which they have leased from the city at \$1 per month for the past four years. However, the city's redevelopment partners and soon-to-be property owners, Ram Development Co. and Pinnacle Realty Advisors, plan to fill the space with new tenants.

As a result, Masque supporters are faced with finding a new home for its participants to practice and perform and a site large enough to accommodate the weekly rehearsals of two vocal groups and Sunday worship services for a religious organization. For several years, the money it receives through subleasing has helped to keep the not-for-profit theater afloat.

However, Masque board members hope the move will only be temporary. They are bent on having the Temple Terrace City Council buy back a 22,000-square-foot parcel of the redevelopment area's 20.36 acres to build an arts and education center. Its plans include space for visual arts activities, dance classes and a theater.

"I know it's a space our residents want, and Masque is one of the important reasons people choose to move here, and I see the value in having it there," said Councilwoman Alison Fernandez during last week's workshop to discuss the issue. "As much as I say I'd like to have it, the problem is the money."

If the city council approves the purchase of the land, the estimated cost to build the arts center is \$10 million.

Councilman Ron Govin said almost \$5 million has been pledged toward the center, and he is fairly certain \$2 million soon will be committed by a major business in the area.

"We're looking to the community to come up with the remainder and, in my opinion, Masque can help us with that," said Govin, who also noted that the city has two years to sell the land back to Ram/Pinnacle should necessary funds not be raised for the center.

Joe LoPinto said his Masque team would be willing to solicit money for the project.

"We want to keep these folks together," he said. "We certainly don't want to take a step backward and lose our quality members and supporters."

Masque board member Margaret Mitchell said she, too, does not want to lose a group that has become an asset to the city.

"It's good for our children; it's good for our community," she said.

The city council has until 30 days before it closes on the sale of the redevelopment area property to Ram/Pinnacle to decide whether it will, in turn, buy back the land for the arts and education center.

Last month, the closing was set for Aug. 15, but the date is likely to change, said Govin, who serves as the city council's liaison in discussions between city officials and Ram/Pinnacle.