

# Temple Terrace, Don't Throw In The Towel

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If you've ever wondered about the location of the proverbial "square one," it's right where Temple Terrace's new downtown is supposed to be.

The city has suffered another disappointing setback in its efforts to build a distinctive city center. But it is not the end of the road for this project, nor should it be.

Chaos on Wall Street and the international credit crisis has trickled down literally to Temple Terrace's Main Street - or at least where Main Street should be. Developers are struggling with tightened access to credit, retail sales are falling and it will be some time before the economy recovers.

This is not an easy or cheap project. But Temple Terrace is right to want more than another soulless strip-mall.

It wants a downtown that allows residents to enjoy the arts, green spaces and quality businesses that will expand and enrich the city's tax base.

That is a vision worth fighting for.

City Manager Kim Leinbach says the city is in good position to cover its obligations on the acreage at the southeastern corner of 56th Street and Bullard Parkway, including a \$5.9 million balloon payment due next year. It is not an ideal scenario, but not a doomsday one.

After being granted four delays in closing on a \$14.9-million purchase of 20 acres of the downtown site, developer Ram/Pinnacle backed out of the deal this month, objecting to a single provision requiring a 90-day termination notice.

Councilman Ron Govin, the city's point man in the negotiations, said the developer was offended by the provision. But economic conditions suggest otherwise. Ram/Pinnacle was having trouble securing a second major retail tenant that would be key in selling the \$50 million project to lenders.

The conditions that make Temple Terrace ideal for this kind of development have not gone away - it has a high concentration of highly educated residents, and the site is located at the intersection of two heavily traveled roads. It can feed off the momentum from nearby University of South Florida.

But to retain its high quality of life, it must ward off blight.

Temple Terrace must continue to keep its eye on the intangibles that make this community a good investment: improving its schools, strengthening its civic organizations, investing in arts and recreation and supporting small businesses.

Residents are understandably frustrated and want to see progress. But for now, the most important asset the city can put on the table is patience.