

MAYOR AFFRONTI'S TALK ON OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

July 21, 2005

With so many opposing viewpoints publicized in the media and in your mailbox over the past several weeks, I'm sure that many of you are wondering what the truths and facts really are regarding the City's Downtown Revitalization Project. I'd like to take a moment to address some of these varying positions, because I feel that it's important that our citizens know the "whole" truth.

I want to assure you that your elected officials who you have put into office represent all of our citizens and genuinely take actions that we feel are in the best interest of our City. We take your trust very seriously. Our system encourages diverse opinions and is very democratic. However, it is offensive to me personally to read the many half truths, misrepresentations, and innuendos that are meant to discredit and challenge the integrity and judgment of our elected officials, with no attempt to seek all of the facts.

I would like to address some of the half-true statements that have been published lately:

1. Temple Terrace Beacon. "The City has spent \$1,400,000 for the water treatment plant and that money is lost at the expense of our taxpayers."

Omitted Fact: While the wastewater treatment facility is not part of the Downtown Revitalization Project, it is an example of how these published misrepresentations discredit and challenge the integrity of our City Government.

The funds were expended to purchase approximately twenty acres of land off I-75 and a set of engineering plans for our wastewater treatment facility. We currently OWN both of those assets and will move forward with the waste water treatment plant when timing is right to secure our permits.

2. Letter dated July 11, 2005: "Plan grew from \$150 million to \$300 million virtually overnight...the only reason given was that it was an incorrect guess on the part of the Community Development Director."

Omitted: We admitted our mistake of developing an incomplete cost estimate too early in the process. Later, we hired nationally acclaimed consultants, Torti Gallas & Partners, and Lesser and Associates, to complete a more refined estimate. We were up front in admitting our error. We did not try to gloss it over and brought the error to the attention of our citizens.

This is a ten-year, five phase project. The cost estimate figure will change as years pass and changes are made to the phasing plan. Of the \$300 million, our development partner will spend \$240 million and our City will spend \$60 million for parks, green ways, infrastructure, and city buildings.

3. Letter dated July 20, 2005: "Two out of three developers agree this plan is a bad idea and not financially feasible."

Omitted: In March of this year, five highly-qualified developers submitted Requests for Qualifications. When our Selection Committee short listed three of these firms, it was determined that each of these developers was capable of doing this project. When two developers indicated that they would not be submitting RFPs in June, one of the two called Ralph Bosek and offered to “complete the RFP requirements” if we would “direct negotiate” with them to avoid competition. The other developer stated that “within a year we’d be talking again”. These are not statements made by developers who truly do not feel that the project is not “financially feasible”.

The first reason given by one developer for backing out of our process was that “we have just been engaged on a large \$350 million fast track high rise that put a nail in the coffin of our firm’s ability to respond further on the Temple Terrace RFP.” The second development firm indicated their concern that the City did not own the Doral Oaks Apartment Complex. The owners of Doral Oaks will not negotiate to sell until a developer is chosen. Our City cannot afford to purchase the property. The other reasons given, such as lease buyouts, etc., are normal business negotiating points.

According to John Stainback, the City’s nationally known development consultant, “None of these reasons can withstand close scrutiny.”

In the meantime, Unicorp did everything that our RFP required and spent approximately \$200,000 to prepare their submittal. In my opinion, it would be unethical and unjust to hinder them from making their presentation. Our consultant, Selection Committee, and City Council will exercise due diligence to determine whether or not to move Unicorp into the next stage, which is contract negotiations. Our consultant, Mr. John Stainback, is renowned for his financial analysis and negotiation expertise. He, along with our longtime City Attorney will protect the City’s interests. In the July 16, 2005 edition of The Northeast Section of the Tampa Tribune, one of our most persistent opponents referred to Mr. Stainback and was quoted as saying: “judging on the few sound bites I heard he asked some very poignant questions. I think probably at the end of the day if he continues in the same vein, the citizens will have benefited from his expertise.”

According to John Stainback, consultant to the City and the developer selection committee: "Based on SPPRE's extensive experience in public/private partnerships, we believe that the Town Center Redevelopment project is viable, is attractive to the development community, and will generate non-tax income and tax revenue for the City thereby minimizing City investment and managing risk."

4. Letter dated July 20, 2005: Our Mayor “undaunted by concerned citizens wants to forge ahead....”

Omitted: This has been a citizen-driven initiative from Day One! My platform in 1998, 2002, and 2004 emphasized making our citizens’ vision a reality. I have worked and will continue to work tirelessly to realize this vision. I understand that there are those who are critical of the citizens’ plan and to avoid criticism, we could do nothing and watch our City decline. This I will not do. I, for one, expect to spend the rest of my life in Temple Terrace and want it to provide the quality of life for my children and grandchildren that I have been blessed to experience.

5. Letter dated July 11, 2005: “I have just received word that our City has spent \$1,400,523 through June, 2005 to move this project forward. These expenditures include postage,

yard signs, and advertising. This is known as spending the tax payer's money to sell them on supporting the tax increase."

Omitted: It is true that the redevelopment project since 2000 has cost \$1,400,523. Of that amount, \$1,365,000 has been spent on the master planning, other team consultants, personnel, information pieces, charrettes, and legal fees, all spent as part of our due diligence in moving this project forward. Only \$35,000 has been spent to move our referendum forward and this money has been allocated from our rental revenue from the leases in the Southeast Quadrant, not tax money. We generate over \$1 million per year in revenue in the Southeast Quadrant. Of the \$1,400,523 spent, \$1,200,000 was generated by our accrued ¼ mill passed in 2001 for redevelopment and the balance from our rental revenue in the shopping center – not tax revenues. Since purchasing the thirty plus acres in the Southeast Quadrant, our City has generated \$1,550,000 in revenues and has realized \$328,000 in income after all expenses including interest.

6. Letter from July 11, 2005: "Voters are being asked to vote 'Yes' August 2, 2005 to approve a property tax increase of 20.4%"

Omitted: The 1 mill increase will represent increase of approximately 4% of your total tax bill. The 20.4% has been calculated on the 4.9 mills charged for the Temple Terrace portion.

7. In a letter in the Temple Terrace News 7/20, it was stated, "if your home tax value is \$150,000, your taxes will increase by \$150 per year on top of the \$75 already in place."

Omitted: On a home valued at \$150,000 with the standard \$25,000 Homestead Exemption, your taxes will increase by \$125 per year and low income seniors will be eligible for an additional \$25,000 Homestead Exemption bringing the increase down to \$100 per year. On a home valued at \$100,000 a low income senior will pay only \$50 per year. The ¼ mill increase for redevelopment passed in 2001 costs \$37.50 per year, not \$75 per year on a \$150,000 home.

8. Letter dated July 20, 2005: "They needed \$60 million for their plan, the tax increase will not even pay for the \$20 million bond. They have a short fall right away."

Omitted: It is true that the 1 mill increase will provide \$20 million of the \$60 million needed, but from Day One we have stated that the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds will potentially generate \$80 million or more in revenues over the next thirty years. We have also stated that we are aggressively pursuing Federal and state grants, appropriations, capital contributions, and other sources that will provide the remaining revenues needed for our project over the next ten years.

9. Letter dated July 11, 2005: "How many of you good people believe we should spend an unknown amount – ranging up to \$25 million of our taxpayers' money to build this Art Center for the purposes stated and for Masque to stage an average of 3 ½ plays a month that less than 200 residents (1% of our residents) attend?"

Omitted: While Masque is considering becoming one tenant of the proposed Arts Education Center, the intent of the facility is truly multi-use, and could be used for recitals, concerts, arts and craft classes, adult classes in computer skills, art exhibits, and classic movies. The facility will also be available for rental for weddings, meetings, and corporate functions. We plan for the Arts Education Center to be paid for by donations, private capital campaigns, and Community Investment tax funds, not property taxes. And the cost will be far less than the \$25 million

stated. The new center will provide many activities for our citizens to enjoy and will generate significant public participation that will contribute to our vibrant Downtown Center.

10. Letter dated July 11, 2005: “The center should contain a 400 seat theatre for Masque.”

Omitted: As I previously mentioned, the 400 seat theatre will be part of a multi-use facility for recitals, concerts, classic movies, lectures, weddings, and corporate rental events, not just for Masque plays as implied. Largo Civic Center is continuously booked for events. A previous City Council member, who wrote a letter recently, has always been a very strong proponent of the cultural arts and strongly supported the previously proposed Masque Theatre Building to be built on Riverhills Drive.

11. Letter dated July 11, 2005: “Largo’s population is 56,000 to 60,000 as compared to our City’s population of 22,000.

Omitted: Our City’s population is approximately 25,000, but we have more than 40,000 USF students and thousands of people in the surrounding areas who will benefit from and participate in the activities at the Arts Education Center. Largo does not rely solely on Largo residents to support their Civic Center.

I have addressed a number of half truths expressed in letters. Some were direct and some were published in local newspapers. From the beginning, we have done everything possible to determine the feasibility of this project that the citizens have demanded.

Our citizen involvement is unprecedented. This was noted by the Hillsborough County Planning Commission who recognized the City of Temple Terrace with a major award for the citizen involvement in this endeavor. The Torti Gallas master plan was also given one of the highest honors in Planning and Urban Design by the Planning Commission this year.

After we exercise due diligence, a developer will be selected to partner with our City.

Our City’s future should be determined by those of us who plan to spend the better part of our lives in Temple Terrace.

We have tried very hard to communicate with all of our citizens and will continue to do so. Please ask questions, express your concerns, and give us the opportunity to address your concerns and answer your questions. Get the facts.

As opponents have stated, “tell the truth, the whole truth” and you shall know “the truth will set you free.” Half truths do not satisfy their statements.

These attempts by a few to make it appear that our staff, elected officials, citizens, and consultants are blindly moving forward with this project and that we are all buffoons is disheartening, and very uncharacteristic of our great citizens. We have stayed on the high road and have given the whole truth and have avoided negativism.

You have elected us to represent you in a manner that is best for our City and citizens for now, and in the future. Your trust will not be violated.

I want to thank all of our citizens for your support. All of our volunteers, who have, each week, knocked on doors to seek your support and answer your questions and concerns. Our staff and Council, who, although they do not always agree on every topic, have time and again, unanimously stated their support for our Revitalization project.

In closing, I want to quote a statement I heard recently. There are four kinds of people:

1. Those who make things happen
2. Those who watch things happen
3. Those who wonder what happened

4. Those who don't want anything to happen.

Let us all join together to make things happen that will leave a wonderful legacy for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you for listening. God bless Temple Terrace and God bless America.