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## Armory Project Land Use At Issue

By JOSE PATINO GIRONA, The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA - The proposed redevelopment of the Fort Homer Hesterly Armory to a luxury hotel, farmers market, restaurants and more is alive with debate, namely over land-use changes, financing and the project's viability.

The Tampa City Council is set to discuss the \$93 million project today, two weeks after a councilman and another developer raised concerns.

Heritage Square, one of three finalists to redevelop the 10-acre site, 522 N. Howard Ave., signed a deal July 19 with the state's Department of Military Affairs' Armory Board. The armory, built in 1941, was a popular spot for concerts, speeches and dances, including appearances by Elvis Presley, President Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Mark Bentley, the Armory Board's Tampa-based attorney, said Heritage Square is looking for a property to relocate the remainder of the Florida National Guard's operation.

He said a property is being considered in Pinellas Park adjacent to where most of the Guard relocated in 2005.

However, an official for one of the other finalists said Heritage Square should already have presented specifics about its plans, including financial feasibility, as required by the city last year.

'It seems the city administration is stonewalling requests for information as has the counsel of the Armory Board,' said Matthew Henry, development manager for Reliant Development of Tampa.

'Without a five-star hotel operator and an operator to manage the farmers market this proposal lacks tenants with which it can finance its project,' Henry told the council Sept. 6.

Reliant's proposal calls for an ice rink and gymnasium facility for the 80,000-square-foot armory building, and residences and retail for the rest of the property. The developer has talked with the Tampa Metropolitan YMCA about operating the rink and gym.

Bentley said Heritage Square submitted financial information in its initial proposal and has not been

asked to do more.

He called the concerns a misunderstanding. 'There is no requirement under the contract for additional financial disclosure,' he said.

Heritage Square hasn't reached the point of naming the project's financial backers, spokeswoman Chris Duffy said.

'We have provided everything the National Guard has asked us,' Duffy said.

The Hillsborough County planning commission is scheduled Nov. 5 to consider a land-use change to allow for private development at the armory site. The Armory Board also needs zoning approval from the council, but that request probably won't be presented until early 2008, Bentley said.

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