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K Partners gets council vote for new civic center hotel

By MIKE BROSSETTE

The Terrebonne Parish Council confirmed San Antonio-based K Partners Hospitality Group at last week's council meeting as the developer of either a Hilton Garden Inn or a Courtyard by Marriott hotel next to the Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center.

K Partners was originally chosen as the developer at the council's Community Development and Planning Committee meeting on Oct. 22.

However, at the council's Nov. 28 meeting, local real estate agent S.P. LaRussa and Councilman Clayton Voisin raised questions about the process used to select the builder.

Mike Ferdinand, Terrebonne Economic Development Authority CEO, had recommended K Partners to the council at the Oct. 22 meeting.

K Partners told TEDA the group would sink \$18 million into building the hotel. A competing group headed by a wealthy south Louisiana land developer - identified by LaRussa as Dr. Settie - said it would spend \$12 million.

LaRussa, representing Settie, told the council the \$12 million figure was an underestimate based on numbers Settie had used to build the Hilton Garden Inn in Lafayette.

"K Partners gave false numbers," LaRussa said at last week's meeting. "My man came back with better numbers. Tonight you have true numbers. Mike Ferdinand said we have to take the best deal. Dr. Settie has the best deal."

LaRussa's further contention that Settie was offering to pay \$80,000 more than K Partners to purchase the parish land for the hotel was not in dispute.

But TEDA asserts that Settie provided inadequate information by the deadline set, and the Louisiana Department of Economic Development could not analyze the numbers before TEDA was faced with the decision.

However, according to Parish Manager Barry Blackwell, TEDA did reevaluate the numbers given by

the two hotel developers.

K Partners had the greater investment.

"We asked TEDA to review all proposals," he said.

Blackwell told the council last week that the parish administration was standing by TEDA's original recommendation of K Partners.

All councilmembers present at the meeting except Clayton Voisin voted for K Partners to be the hotel developer.

"K Partners turned in its information by a certain date - it was the only one," said Councilman Peter Rhodes.

Parish attorney Courtney Alcock said the process of selecting the developer was not subject to bid laws and that requests for proposals were not required.

Economic considerations took precedence during the selection process.

Councilman Harold Lapeyre said he wanted the hotel built as soon as possible.

"We've been waiting 10 years," he said. "The doctor was late getting his information in. I want a hotel built by the civic center. It will improve the sales taxes for the rest of the parish."