

## Threat of legal challenges delays **Sarasota's downtown** progress

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Long ago, in a land where real estate prices were something short of galactic, the people came together and created a vision for their downtown. A star-dweller named Andres Duany guided them, leaving behind a biblical code and a warning: Nurture this or it will fail.

The land was Sarasota, of course, and has it really been just five years since the downtown master plan was conceived? It seems like centuries -- during which the threat of legal challenges has delayed progress and sapped civic momentum.

The plan has evolved, but the threats aren't over. At a meeting Monday, city commissioners heard the rumblings of attorneys representing business people upset with master-plan restrictions on their building options.

Commissioners clearly seem willing to rectify some problems, such as isolated cases where the rules unfairly hamper rational development. But in other cases, owners' demands clash with fundamental principles of the plan -- and not for the first time.

Landowners and business interests challenged the Duany plan in 2002. The city made concessions to keep the master plan from bogging down in legal mud. But now, with the regulations still in limbo and more challenges threatened, it appears that the "settlement" was just a temporary reprieve.

Must this disputatious ground be plowed over and over? Will the community's vision ever be realized?

Property rights are vital to a civil society, but so is the voice of consensus -- and the people spoke plainly five years ago. We urge potential challengers to aim for the common good. The master plan can serve it, if given a chance.