

# Merchant's association revival attempted

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Reviving a voluntary downtown merchant's association is a way to move forward, unite downtown business people and put the controversy of the business improvement district (BID) to rest, said merchant Ellie Potts.

Several downtown business people met this week to discuss the longtime group that dissolved when the BID was formed. John Schmit, president of the Rapid City Area Chamber of Commerce, has offered to provide a meeting place and some administrative help to get the group going.

Potts, owner of Prince and Pauper

Book Shop on St. Joseph Street, said: "Basically the response was positive. People want to start working on promotions."

Potts and Peggy Busse of Top Drawer, another St. Joseph Street store, recently began planning to revive the association. Potts said it would initially deal with sales promotions and other events.

"We're taking it one step at a time," she said.

The new group would be an all-volunteer organization, paying dues instead of taxes. The BID was a quasi-governmental authority that levied taxes on downtown businesses to pay for everything from promo-

tions to business development. It was authorized by the Rapid City Common Council but defeated at the polls in December, after a rancorous debate that hinged on the mandatory payments.

Potts hoped the voluntary organization would help reunite downtown business people.

Schmit said more than a dozen people attended Tuesday's initial meeting. Details of a new association have not been worked out; one of the projects is to find records of the previous organization.

The old organization had between 50 and 75 members, each paying about \$100 a year in dues. Schmit

said it was an outgrowth of the chamber's retail committee, which several years ago dealt primarily with downtown businesses.

As Rapid City's retail community spread out and included shopping centers in other parts of town, Schmit said, downtown merchants formed their own organization.

When the city became involved in Mainstreet USA, a state-administered program to restore and reinvigorate downtown business districts, money became available for a full-time administrator. That in turn became the Downtown Development Commission, funded by the BID.