

DDC awaits temporary new director

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The Downtown Development Corp. may have a temporary director sometime in the next two weeks.

The organization has been without an executive director since Sept. 14, when Bryan Schnell left the post. Lee Geiger, head of the committee in search of a new director, said the search for a permanent chief is on hold.

He said the remaining two-person staff is doing a good job, but they have too much work to do by themselves. They need a director right away, but the committee wants to conduct a thorough hunt for a permanent replacement, he said.

The interim executive director could be a candidate for the permanent job, Geiger said. "We have some very qualified applicants," he said. Some are interested only in the temporary job, and others would like to stay.

Schnell had the job for 2½ years. The development group now is funded by a recently passed business improvement district (BID), a taxing mechanism that remains controversial among business people downtown.

BID opponents have been circulating an initiative petition, hoping to defeat the measure in a citywide election. Tax bills went out earlier this month.

The DDC has a budget of \$160,000 to \$180,000 a year. Its job is to coordinate promotions, marketing and development of the downtown area.

"The applicants, especially the local people, are well aware of the tenuousness of the job," Geiger said.

Geiger was not sure how many people have applied; some informally expressed an interest, and others formally applied. Nearly all the applicants are from this area, partly because the job has not been advertised, he added.

The committee, he said, is still working out the details of how it will find a permanent executive director. Geiger and the other committee members also serve on the BID board of directors. The board, made up of downtown merchants, was appointed by the mayor when the downtown tax district was formed.

"We don't feel we can wait," he said. "For now we want someone to go in who knows it could be a temporary position." If the job is advertised nationally, the search would take more than 45 days.

When he announced his resignation, Schnell said the tempest over the BID — opponents and proponents have fought over the measure in city hall and in circuit court — undermined his ability to run the DDC.

A new person would not have what Schnell referred to as "baggage." He turned in his resignation Aug. 27, during the BID board's regular meeting. He remained on the job a few weeks after he resigned.