Troubling times for downtown?

THE ISSUE: A new group has formed to offer an alternative plan for downtown's development.

OUR VIEW: Input is always welcome. But we worry competing groups will be counter productive.

Downtown Rapid City's revitalization plans have just taken a turn that could lead to one of two things: Two groups working hand-in-hand or a hurdle that will be difficult to clear, slowing downtown development.

We suspect the latter will be the case.

Last week, a downtown business owner and a member of the city council formed a group to create a plan for economic growth in the downtown area. The group was formed out of disagreement over a business improvement district and downtown plaza — both proposed by Destination Rapid City.

While the new group — Citizens United for a Better Idea — has an interest in complementing the work of Destination Rapid City, often different goals lead to insurmountable friction. Meaning, for downtown, a loss of forward momentum.

Participation in these decisions is always welcome, however. And even though the new group is basing its proposal on the 2003 downtown revitalization plan created by a Downtown Empowerment District committee, we've seen nothing to judge its proposal's merits.

At this point we need to take a wait-and-see approach. Maybe it will be a better proposal? Maybe it will find unanimous support in the downtown business community? We can only hope that's the case.

But the inherent difficulty for downtown development will be that two groups with competing ideas are working with the business owners who will likely not be willing to invest their hard-earned money in both proposals. Unanimous, possibly even majority, support will be hard to come by.

Another conflict, of course, is the inclusion of a council member on the new group. While the council member felt compelled to be involved in the process rather than the vote at the city council meeting, that's certainly going to raise eyebrows and create an issue. It creates a conflict of interest, possibly only perceived, but it's clear the council member should abstain from voting on downtown issues from this point on.

We have been supportive of the work of Destination Rapid City and the proposed corner plaza but the majority of business owners haven't shown the same willingness to invest in the idea. And now with a competing group developing new ideas for downtown, we can only hope that earlier good work hasn't been for naught.

Downtown development can't get enough attention. At this point, let's hope that attention is positive, free from the friction that seems to be appearing on the horizon.