

Property owners sign on for Business Improvement District

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A coalition of property owners representing two-thirds of all property downtown have signed on in favor of a special tax district to pay for downtown improvements.

A revised petition for the downtown Business Improvement District, submitted to the city Jan. 13, includes signatures for 67 percent of assessable front footage, or 52 percent of all property owners — far more than were originally submitted by Destination Rapid City in November.

"I want the entire community to know there is support for this, that it's the majority," interim Destination president Dan Senftner said. "It's important that Rapid Citians know that."

The original Nov. 3 petition fell short of the required signatures after discrepancies — including property owners not signing for all of their properties or signing on the wrong line — were discovered by city staff.

State law requires petitions to include signatures representing 50 percent plus one of the proposed district's assessable front footage.

The shortfall forced the Rapid City Council

to cancel a Jan. 11 public hearing on the tax district.

A rescheduled hearing, taking into consideration the new petition, will be held at 7 p.m. Feb. 22.

Senftner said the group never stopped gathering signatures and will continue to do so up to Feb. 22.

"We want to keep moving," Senftner said. "How can you have too much support? You can't."

Signatures on the revised petitions, which are available in the City Finance Office, run the gamut from big-time property owners to small business owners.

Those who have added their support in the past two months include the owners of Rushmore Plaza Holiday Inn, Town House Motel, Rushmore Honda, The Little Print Shop, Black Hills Community Bank and Curry Masala.

Organizers have gathered dozens of new or revised signatures, bringing the total number to 201. Only 152 properties still fall into the category of "against, neutral or unknown," Senftner said.

But not all people downtown think the revised petitions should count.

Petition signatures range in date from

January 2009 to January 2010. During that time, though, the BID proposal changed from a uniform assessment for numerous downtown improvements to a two-level assessment that would pay for the operation of a public plaza at Main and Sixth streets.

Don Frankenfeld, an economist who rents an office downtown, said he doesn't want to stand in the way of Main Street Square or the special tax district.

But both need to be done right; and in Frankenfeld's opinion, that means re-circulating the petitions.

"It's a mistake to use a document that has no beginning period or ending period to it," Frankenfeld said. "It would be as if John Thune circulated a petition that said, 'I would like to be elected to the governorship or the U.S. Senate. Take your pick.' You can't do that. You have to pick one or the other."

But Senftner said they have their bases covered.

"They have all been contacted, and all the signatures have been re-approved," Senftner said. "We've been on the phone and paid many a one-on-one visit."

"That's why we have the majority today."

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What is the downtown Business Improvement District?

The Rapid City Council will consider pursuing the establishment of a special tax district downtown to pay for the operations of Main Street Square, the proposed public plaza at the corner of Main and Sixth streets.

Under the proposal, property owners would be assessed a special tax based on their properties' proximity to the core of downtown. Zone 1 would include all properties bordered by Mount Rushmore Road, Omaha Street, Fifth Street and Kansas City Street. Zone 2 includes all commercial properties outside those boundaries between West Boulevard, Columbus Street and East Boulevard.

Zone 1: \$1.50 per \$1,000 assessed value.

Zone 2: \$0.75 per \$1,000 assessed value.