Opponents of downtown BID wait to gauge petition progress

By Barbara Soderlin Journal staff

Opponents of the downtown Business Improvement District won’t know until Friday how much progress they are making toward bringing the issue to a citywide vote.

They will need an estimated 2,077 signatures to force a referendum on the city council’s decision on establishing the taxing district, but opponent Mary Renka, office manager at Black Hills Psychiatry Associates, isn’t sure how close they are.

“I haven’t a clue because we’ve got so many petitions out there,” she said. She said she has distributed about 40 copies of the petition to people who wanted to help gather signatures.

The district would raise money that would initially pay for maintenance and programming at the proposed Main Street Square, the public park and venue planned for the corner of Sixth and Main streets.

“We are not against growth in downtown Rapid City,” Renka said. “We are just against the way they’re planning to pay for the maintenance of this park?” She said the whole city, not just downtown property owners, should share the cost.

The petitioners have until 5 p.m. Friday to turn in the signatures. City administrative coordinator Amber Sitts said city staff would have to stay Friday until the signatures are checked and counted.

They will be checking just to make sure all the lines are filled in correctly with a name, date and other needed information, but won’t be verifying that each signature comes from an individual registered voter.

If someone wishes to challenge the validity of the signatures, Sitts said, they would have five days after the signatures are turned in to submit an affidavit challenging specific signatures. It would be up to the challenger to check to see if each person signing a petition is a valid registered voter in the city.

Under the city’s current plan, the district would be divided into two zones, with businesses in Zone 1 paying $1.50 per $1,000 assessed value and business in Zone 2 paying $0.75 per $1,000 assessed value. 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.

Contact Barbara Soderlin at 394-8417 or barbara.soderlin@rapidcityjournal.com.