

New downtown group forms

Those interested in participating are invited to a meeting from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Monday at St. Joe Street Factory.

By Dan Daly
Journal Staff Writer

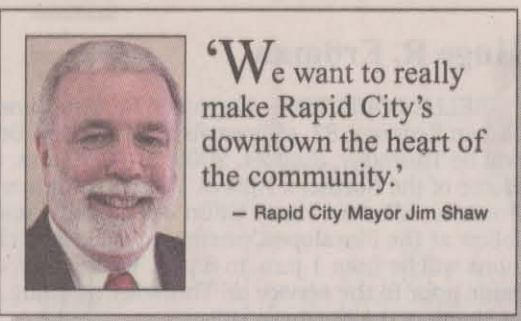
Before World War II, downtown Rapid City was the center of the community, a place where people shopped, worked and lived. The post office, city hall, library and most of the retail stores were downtown.

Mayor Jim Shaw and a group of downtown businesses and community people want the district to regain some of that luster. Shaw announced Tuesday that the group is forming a new Downtown Empowerment District Committee.

"We want to really make Rapid City's downtown the heart of the community," Shaw said during a side-walk news conference at the corner of Sixth and St. Joseph streets.

Although downtown merchants have had a United Downtown Association for several years, Shaw said the new group would have a different mission. The UDA, he said, is more focused on promoting businesses that are already downtown; the new committee would be involved in long-term development issues.

Dan Tribby, retail manager at Prairie Edge Trading Co. & Galleries and an active member



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— Rapid City Mayor Jim Shaw

of UDA, said he likes the idea of the empowerment district.

"Anything we can do to bring positive attention to downtown ... and help formulate plans for the future is going to be a good deal," Tribby said. "There's been a lot of talk about things like this, and I definitely think it's time."

Dennis Halterman of the St. Joe Street Factory, one of the organizers of the group, said he believes a new commit-

tee can help jump-start the process of building long-term economic vitality in downtown Rapid City. "We want to get the momentum going," he said.

The group's membership has not been established. Those interesting in participating are invited to a meeting Monday, July 28, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the St. Joe Street Factory, 614 St. Joseph St.. The group will look at issues including parking, public transportation, attracting new businesses and increasing residential housing downtown.

By Labor Day, Shaw said, he hopes the group will have a specific plan drafted. Some of the subjects that Shaw touched on Tuesday:

■ **Transportation:** Downtown merchants have talked about creating a downtown trolley line that could shuttle

See **Downtown,** page C3

Downtown: Partners

From Page C1

shoppers and workers in from little-used parking lots at The Journey Museum or Rushmore Plaza Civic Center.

■ **Residential housing:** Shaw said he believes three elements make a healthy downtown: shoppers, workers and full-time residents. There are shoppers and workers downtown, but housing opportunities are lacking, he said.

Shaw said the city could consider forming public-private partnerships with developers to build apartment buildings or other housing on sites now used as city-owned parking lots. The projects would have to offer enough public off-street parking to offset the loss of city-owned lots, he said.

In some cities, notably Denver, downtown districts have become magnets for young people who flock to lofts, apartment buildings and other upscale housing. UDA's Tribby said he agrees that more downtown housing, particularly on the upper floors of existing buildings, would be good for the district.

■ **Panhandling and public drunkenness:** Shaw said people perceive it to be worse

than it is, but the Rapid City Police Department has pledged to step up law enforcement downtown to reduce it.

■ **Historic architecture:** The local group could work with state and federal historic-preservation agencies to promote the preservation and renovation of downtown Rapid City's historic buildings, Shaw said. Tax breaks and historic facade easements are available to building owners.

Asked about funding for items such as trolley cars, Shaw said those details would have to be worked out. "We don't want this to be focused on money at this point," he said.

More than a decade ago, Rapid City formed a short-lived Business Improvement District downtown. It was a quasi-governmental organization with the power to levy taxes on downtown businesses and spend the revenue on various promotions and improvement projects.

Opponents launched a city-wide referendum, and voters repealed the BID in December of 1990.

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