BID allies hope for council interest

PUBLIC INPUT: Proponents of tax district say it is a plan that will promote growth downtown, but critics want more diverse options.

By Barbara Soderlin
Journal Staff

Dan Senftner hopes a lot of people with different points of view turn out for tonight's hearing on the proposed downtown Business Improvement District.

"Our downtown is in good shape," he said, but with an improvement district, "it will get better. You can't make anything happen without a good plan and direction, and right now, we have both." But critics disagree the plan is unneeded and hope to convince the city council to look at other options.

The council has three choices for what to do at the end of the hearing, city attorney Jason Green said.

Aldermen can vote to direct the preparation of an ordinance to create the district, which would start the ball rolling on the legal process. The soonest the district could go into effect would be May. The council can also vote to reject the proposal or can continue the matter to a later meeting.

If you go

What: Public hearing on downtown Business Improvement District proposal
When: 7 p.m. Monday
Where: City council chambers, 300 Sixth St.

Have a say: Anyone who wishes to comment on the proposal can fill out a request form before or during the hearing.

Inside

When would a Business Improvement District be put into effect? AB

BID: Those who work in or own property downtown are urged to attend meeting.

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When would it happen?

Today: The city council will hold a public hearing on a proposal to create a downtown Business Improvement District. If the council wants to pursue the idea, it will direct the preparation of an ordinance to create the district.

March 10: The draft ordinance would be read at the Legal & Finance Committee meeting.

March 15: First reading of the ordinance at city council meeting

April 2: Second reading of ordinance at Legal & Finance Committee meeting.

April 9: Second reading of the ordinance at city council meeting. There would be opportunity for public comment at all of those meetings.

May 1: District would become effective.

City attorney Jason Green said May 1 is the soonest the district could take effect, but also called it a "realistic timeline." "This community is not going to petition to do it," he said. "It's just going to be abandoned and run down." He would prefer to spread the BID income among many projects in the city's already established historic districts.

"Putting all our eggs in one basket is not the way to go, because we're never going to expand," Haltermann said. For those paying into the BID, "They need to see where the value is for them," he said.

Also, because of the significant revenue sharing programs in the Cordova and Newburgh, the public won't feel ownership of the park.

Senftner said he agrees with the opponents on many points, including that the tax will have to serve more than just the square. "The Main Street Square is the first step," he said.

Senftner said the square will eventually become self-supporting through vendor booth rentals and concession sales, and at that point, he said, the BID tax money would be available for other projects, including marketing the whole downtown as a destination.

Alderman Costello said he will be looking for assurance of that at Monday night's hearing. "I'll be paying attention to how the initially proposed projects will become self-funded, and what the vision is for the use of the BID income next," he said. "I've heard some pretty positive feedback on the desire for a long-term vision." He has also heard constituents say they're looking for different methods of funding the project besides the BID.

Costello encouraged people to present their ideas about the proposal.

"It's still very much in its conceptual phase, and nothing is set in stone," he said. "I'm really hoping that Monday night's meeting is a flow of ideas and not just obstructionism views."

People who work and own property downtown are still learning about the BID plan, said Senftner, who stepped into the role of Destination Rapid City Interim president after former president John Brewer, a retired banker, stepped down in January.

Since then, Senftner has continued to make presentations almost daily to civic organizations, businesses and property owners and other individuals with an interest in the proposal.

"We have momentum," he said.

"We have energy right now," he said.

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