What does the BID do?

Editor's note: These stories are the last of a two-day package of stories about the downtown Business Improvement District.

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When voters go to the polls Tuesday, they will decide the fate of the Business Improvement District, the latest incarnation of a 12-year effort to revive downtown Rapid City.

For the past several months, BID taxes have funded the Downtown Development Commission, the organization-turned-agency with a loosely defined job description.

Basically, the DDC's purpose is to recruit new businesses and help existing ones expand, to promote and improve the civic image of downtown, and to maintain an appropriate mix of retail, service and office uses.

If voters turn down a ballot measure to kill the BID, the agency will have about $168,000 a year to accomplish those goals. Of the $84,000 budgeted for the last six months of 1990, $26,000 is slated for salaries of the three-person staff. It is the largest item in the budget.

What will the downtown merchants get for their $168,000? Lon Rempher, interim director of the DDC, said the downtown BID battle

Main and St. Joseph streets need to be made with downtown business in mind, he added. Rempher believes the DDC can make sure construction schedules keep disruptions to retailers minimal.

A recent city-funded master plan indicated downtown Rapid City had enough parking spaces, but Rempher disagrees. He will push for more parking in the western part of downtown.

Rempher said the DDC had a role in achieving lower rates at little-used, off-street parking lots, making more room for customer parking on the streets. (See story on page H1.)

- Planning. The DDC could help make downtown more user friendly to out-of-town shoppers, Rempher said, by putting up signs pointing out historical sites and public parking lots.
- General services. If the DDC board of directors deems a need for such things, the agency could put on business seminars, education programs, advertising promotions and other aids to downtown merchants.

In its two months of BID funding, the commission has spent about $19,000. Much of the $84,000 balance will be spent on Christmas promotions, said Rempher.

On Tuesday, the voters will decide where to go from there.

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agency simply could serve as a street keeper, making sure trash cans are emptied and sidewalks are clean.

But, he added, "I think the scope is a lot bigger than that."

The list includes:

- Expansion and retention. Rempher says he has been working with one local business developing a marketing plan that will boost its sales and employment.

Businesses will stay and prosper if the commercial district has plenty of shopping and shoppers. He said the DDC had been working to fill vacant space.

- Promotions. The DDC bought three billboards touting downtown for Christmas shopping. It also put together a slate of holiday events, including a Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

Other promotions include the Art-Oberfest, co-op advertising sections for merchants, street dances, military appreciation day — all things the DDC hopes will draw people downtown.

- A downtown lobby. Rempher said the DDC dealt with city government on behalf of merchants on snow removal, zoning, sign ordinances and other issues that affect downtown.

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