Vote ‘no’ Tuesday
to benefit downtown

The most sensible, responsible vote for Rapid City taxpayers in Tuesday’s special downtown Business Improvement District election is “no.”

The furor over the special tax district has been largely irrelevent to the issue. In fact, the controversy has served mostly to obscure the issue.

Here’s the situation. The major portion of downtown’s business community, in compliance with state law, openly has created a special business improvement district. Every business within that district is assessed a relatively small amount of additional tax that is used to fund improvements within the area, and only within that area. No business or person outside the BID area is assessed. Those who receive the direct benefits pay the bill.

However, a vocal minority of businesses is opposed to the BID. Opponents tried to stop the process during its formation, and when it went before the Rapid City Common Council, but lost. The council properly approved formation of the BID, because it was in the best interests of the city to do so. Opponents then resorted to Tuesday’s referendum vote as a last-gasp effort to convince Rapid City citizens at large to bend downtown businessmen to their viewpoint.

Voters should refuse to disestablish the BID by voting “no” on Tuesday. It is in their own selfish interest to vote no.

Rapid City’s downtown is in a state of economic decline. The BID is the proper vehicle to try to reverse that decline. For if downtown continues to decline, tax revenues to the city, county and state also dwindle. That means that businesses and people outside the downtown area will pay proportionately more in taxes. In truth, it even means that downtown will absorb a larger share of the city’s overall tax burden, as businesses desert it and the city faces a proportionately higher maintenance burden for the area.

The opponents of the special district prefer, for narrow reasons, that all Rapid City taxpayers bear the burden of a deteriorating city center.

However, most downtown businesses want to make downtown better, which is in the best interest of the entire city and its taxpayers. Those BID backers want downtown to prosper and be a credit to the city. They formed the BID, assessing themselves rather than city taxpayers in general, to renovate and revitalize downtown.

Yes, the BID is controversial. But the controversy largely and intentionally is designed to mislead. The BID is not an effort to ruin downtown’s economy, but to improve it. It’s not an effort to impose the will of a minority on the majority, but a majority determined to control its own destiny.

The BID is opposed largely by those who would rather curse the darkness than light a candle.

The decision is simple. If voters want downtown to wither and be supported to a greater share by their tax dollars, they should vote “yes” in favor of decay. If they want it to thrive and grow and stand more on its own, they should vote “no” against destroying the BID.