Pared BID beats a deceased BID

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Hard won compromises appear to have saved a proposed Rapid City Downtown Business Improvement District, though the new BID would be a slightly watered down version of the original plan.

If the final plan works, those who stuck with the process will have accomplished something worthwhile for downtown Rapid City.

The compromises scaled back the original plan, which called for assessments of 20 cents per square foot on 75 percent of each downtown building's space. That would have raised $294,000 a year. The new plan, which assesses 10 cents a square foot on 100 percent of the space, will raise about $185,000.

In the most important and dangerous compromise, BID supporters agreed to take a straw poll of business owners in the downtown area. If a majority reject the proposal, the BID is dead. Opponents of the BID said the principle of "one person, one vote" was at stake, but that was always misleading. Sidewalk assessments, sewer and water assessments and other improvements are regularly enacted by weighting votes according to the amount of property owned. The danger of giving each business owner one vote is that several very small businesses could band together to halt a project for a very large area.

If that happens in downtown Rapid City, it would be a shame. Downtown areas throughout the United States are deteriorating. There are a number of reasons for this, but one is the lack of coordinated planning and promotion for downtown businesses. The Rapid City BID would provide funds for such planning and promotion.

The compromises were not reached easily. BID opponents strongly objected to many aspects of the plan. While we think the original plan was a good one, those objections are understandable. Parties on both sides of the issue worked hard for three months to reach the current compromises.

If the BID is approved in the straw poll and by the Rapid City Common Council, that work will not have been in vain.