It may be back to start for BID

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Staff Writer

A proposal to create a Business Improvement District (BID) in downtown Rapid City may need to “almost go back to square one” to stop feuding between downtown merchants, said a spokesman for the group supporting the BID.

But one of the key opponents of the proposal said the offer to reconsider the BID proposal sounded “too good to be true.”

Bryan Schnell, executive director of the Downtown Development Corp., said the appointment of a 21-member board to present a BID proposal to the Rapid City Common Council was “a very positive opportunity.”

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from certain.

Randy Hildebrant, a key opponent of the BID and a member of the recently named BID board, said he was open to reconsidering a plan for downtown improvements.

“I hope that’s what they are up to, but it’s too good to be true,” Hildebrant said. “The reason I say this is, the night of that meeting the mayor showed that he is definitely for this by picking a slanted board that was 3-to-1 on their side. He (Schnell) has almost got to say that. For once, we almost have an equal say in something.”

When some aldermen objected to the board the mayor wanted to appoint, some supporters volunteered to be removed, and others were appointed in their place.

Hildebrant and other opponents of BID believe the Downtown Development Corp. (DDC) has excluded them from developing the BID proposal, and that the DDC and city officials have not listened to their objections.

“There’s been so many things they (DDC members) have done behind closed doors up to now. Why would they turn around now and show all this good-faith effort that we’ve been asking for for five months? That’s why I say it’s too good to be true. I hope I’m wrong,” he said.

Schnell said he hoped the BID board members could begin talking about the types of improvements they would like to see downtown.

“What we’ll do is we’ll get the people who have been, up to now, opponents and proponents and get them together in one working group,” Schnell said Wednesday. “And I think we have to come into that meeting with a very open mind. ... Every group has to be able to come into this ready to discard everything. That’s the only way it’s going to work.”

The board was appointed Monday night by Mayor Keith Carlyle after the council approved the first steps in creating the BID. Opposition to forming the BID remained strong and vocal, and it was apparent that final council approval of the BID was far from certain.

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“Then we’ll get into funding, and I see this taking several meetings,” Schnell said. “Before we get into any of this, we have to knock down the animosity and build an atmosphere of trust, and we’ve got to get to know each other.”

But Schnell said he didn’t know whether DDC members were ready to discard their BID idea, but that they had to have open minds.

Schnell said a BID plan would not be brought before the council on Dec. 18 as originally planned.

Under the BID proposal, downtown merchants or property owners would have been assessed a fee based on square footage, with the money used to pay for downtown improvements and promotions. The BID would have been administered by an elected board, and the BID’s annual budget would have been subject to approval by the common council.

Although supporters said a BID was a way to revitalize downtown, opponents said it was an unfair and unwanted tax. One of their main objections was that the assessment was mandatory. But BID supporters said that, in the past, voluntary participation had not worked and that it was always the same merchants and businesses who organized and paid for downtown promotions.

Schnell said he hoped something positive could come from the bickering over the BID proposal.

“We’ve got to put a positive spin on this. We can’t keep tearing each other apart or we’re just not going to get anywhere.”