



Bill Keleher, an Albuquerque attorney, chats with Julia Youngs, board president of the Downtown ABQ MainStreet Arts and Cultural District, on Wednesday. Property owners met at 505 Central Food Hall to discuss the formation of a Downtown Business Improvement District. CHANCEY BUSH/JOURNAL

Second time's the charm?

Downtown property owners weigh formation of new Business Improvement District

BY MATTHEW NARVAIZ JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Jesus Zamora remembers six years ago trying to bring more public restrooms to Downtown Albuquerque, an idea that eventually “fell flat.”

“I went to meetings for two years, and we bickered about how to implement that. It got to a point where we did approve a design, and then no one really wanted the public restroom adjacent to their business,” Zamora, owner of the Sister Bar, said. “But I think it’s important.”

Zamora, who also owns a property next to his bar, and other Downtown property owners gathered at 505 Central Food Hall on Wednesday morning, one of the first meetings discussing the possible formation of a new Business Improvement District, or BID.

The BID, a mechanism used in cities across the country in which property owners pay a membership fee for services like public safety and cleanliness, has gained steam in recent months. It comes as other tools — including a bill recently signed into law that penalizes owners of vacant and dilapidated buildings, and tax increment financing — have also been introduced to boost economic activity and incentivize growth in the heart of Albuquerque.

Owners on Wednesday heard a presentation from Brad Segal, principal of the Denver-based firm Progressive Urban Management Associates, which is aiding stakeholders in forming the proposed Downtown BID.

For Segal and his team, who have helped form 90 BIDs in cities across the country, it will be the second time helping property owners in Downtown Albuquerque form a district. The firm worked on a previous district in the area before it disbanded in 2015.

“I think there were some flaws in what we put together in 2000,” Segal said. “It’s got to be managed well.”

Property owners were given a survey, asking them to rank their priorities for a potential BID. The survey included public safety, capital improvements, advocacy, beautification and maintenance, among others. Segal said the responses sync with those of the stakeholder group that has been meeting in recent months.

“(The) top priorities — overwhelmingly — are enhancing public safety and cleanliness,” Segal said, who added that there was “mixed support” for advocacy, beautification and marketing.

Segal’s firm hopes to finish the draft plan framework, as well as get a baseline services agreement from the city — outlining what services it would continue to offer to the area — as soon as this month. By April, a decision should be rendered on whether a BID will move forward, he said.

Julia Youngs, board president for the Downtown ABQ MainStreet Arts and Cultural District, which runs the growers market in the area, called the formation of a new BID “a really interesting process.” She’s still weighing whether a BID would be good for the area or not.

“Downtown is an amazing place — it’s a place that I will always champion and ride for,” Youngs said. “But I think, you know, we have to remember that our community is not just business owners or property owners. It’s a place that people move through. It includes people who are outside of Downtown. It includes our unhoused community members.

“And so my main priority is always how we’re making sure that all voices are heard, and how we’re making sure it’s run and implemented as ethically and equitably as possible.”

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