

## Downtown BID hits critical phase

### Petition begins circulation as support rallies, opposition hardens

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Jim Long remembers Downtown Albuquerque's first Business Improvement District like it was yesterday.

Long ultimately led the charge that ended that BID, which he said was fraught with issues created by what he called an "improper structure." Today, he is among those in support of establishing a new BID — one he says will be "well-constructed."

"I think we have a good BID now," said Long, the CEO and founder of Heritage Cos.

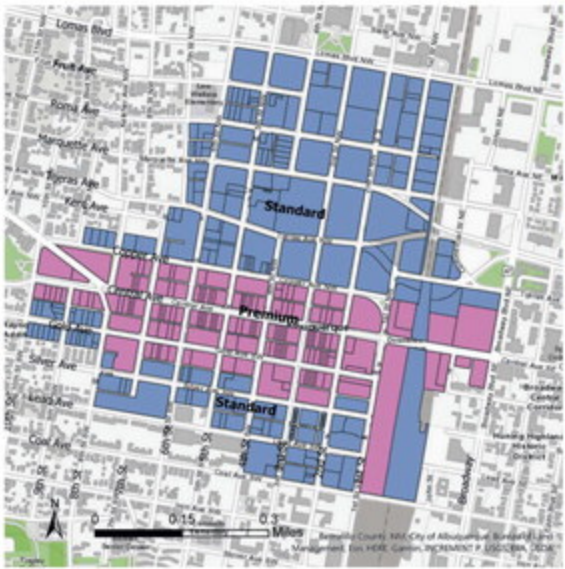
Many of the local officials and property owners who have been focusing their attention on Downtown Albuquerque and its revitalization in recent years share Long's sentiment and believe the creation of a BID is a pivotal step forward for Downtown.

After months of planning and discussion, the BID now faces the crucial first step of collecting signatures from property owners through a petition that began circulating on Friday, according to Bill Keleher, an Albuquerque attorney leading the BID effort.

The petition needs signatures from at least 51% of the proposed district's property owners, of which there are more than 180. While support from Downtown property owners like Long could help push the effort forward, other large property owners remain steadfast in their opposition to the proposed BID, making for what Long



The Downtown Albuquerque skyline on Thursday. CHANCEY BUSH/JOURNAL



A map of Albuquerque's proposed Downtown Business Improvement District boundaries and service zones. Property owners in the premium zone will pay more and receive more services, while owners in the standard zone will pay less and receive fewer services. COURTESY OF BILL KELEHER



Bill Keleher waits for his order at Lindy's Diner on Wednesday. Keleher, an attorney, is leading the formation of a new Business Improvement District in Downtown Albuquerque. CHANCEY BUSH/JOURNAL

says will be "a close vote."

The BID effort coincides with other economic development tools picking up steam, such as a Tax Increment Financing District, or TIF, which the City Council approved for Downtown in December. The TIF allows the city to capture up to 75% of growth of gross receipts and property taxes collected Downtown for reinvestment into the district.

Comparatively, a BID is a mechanism through which property owners band together to pool their resources in the form of a tax assessment. The BID ultimately collects money from property owners and invests it into an area, in this case Downtown, to support services such as cleaning, maintenance, security and marketing.

Some of these are services already offered by the city; the BID aims to enhance, grow and add to those services, but not to replace them, according to a fact sheet on the proposed BID.

"We need a better Downtown. We've got some good stuff going Downtown, but it needs to be better," Keleher said. He added the BID would be "a chance for the property owners to take leadership" on change in Downtown.

## Addressing past issues

Albuquerque was the first city in New Mexico to establish a BID, according to Journal archives. The former Downtown BID, established in 2000, lasted more than a decade before a lawsuit and numerous problems led to its downfall in 2014. Now, Albuquerque is one of the largest U.S. cities without a BID.

Long, whose Downtown real estate holdings include the WaFd building and The Clyde Hotel, was behind the lawsuit that successfully dissolved the former Downtown BID. He said there were numerous issues, including the collection and approval of invalid signatures. Long said signatures obtained to renew the BID were not from the property owners authorized to sign, but rather from people working at or loosely involved with the businesses.

“I am in support of the BID, provided that the BID signatures are valid signatures,” Long said. “We’re going to do some verification on these signatures.”

Long’s support is a “very important” piece to the puzzle, Keleher said, adding he and his team crafted the petition so that anyone who wants to audit the signatures can do so.

Additionally, the new BID will address past issues of what Long called “very diluted” voices paying into the BID by forming a board made up of property owners, according to a fact sheet on the Downtown BID.

Another issue with the previous BID was that the organization running it concentrated services in areas outside where the majority of BID owners were located, so most BID payers didn’t see the benefits of those services. The proposed BID addresses this by splitting Downtown up into two service zones: standard and premium.

Property owners in the standard zone will pay less into the BID at a rate of \$0.082 per square foot of their property, expected to be collected annually, according to the new BID’s fact sheet and Keleher. Owners in the premium zone, located primarily along Central and Gold SW, between Copper NW and Silver SW, will pay more at a rate of \$0.132 per square foot and will receive “approximately double the safe and clean services,” the facts sheet states.

Both zones will get the same marketing and annual special programming, according to the fact sheet.

Safety and cleaning services will be the primary focus of the BID, receiving \$1.2 million of the BID’s proposed \$1.7 million annual budget, a fact sheet on the BID states. The BID has budgeted \$200,000 for marketing and special projects, and allocated the remaining \$250,000 to management and advocacy.

Long said this is also an improvement from the past BID, which he said put roughly 40% of the budget toward administrative costs.

Keleher said the majority of property owners he’s spoken with are in favor of the BID, and he’s optimistic about reaching the 51% of votes needed to help form one.

## Some opposition

Downtown’s largest property owner, Douglas Peterson, has been the most vocal opponent of the BID. Writing in an opinion letter to the Journal, Peterson said Downtown’s “serious crime and vagrancy issues” are unlikely to be solved by a BID.

In an interview with the Journal, Peterson said he would prefer to establish a private organization similar to a BID that would be security focused and allows property owners to opt in or out. Peterson said he has already created the organization, called United Neighbors Improving Downtown Albuquerque, and is in the process of creating a nonprofit of it. He said he has pitched the idea to several property owners.

“I’ve got money ready to go, got participants ready to go,” Peterson said. “I’ll do it as an alternate to the BID and we don’t need to go and ask the government for permission.”

If a majority approves the BID petition, officials will submit it to the City Council for a public hearing and begin the process of approving it through an ordinance.

Peterson said he will exhaust all efforts, including taking legal measures, to oppose the BID if passed, but he said he'd prefer to spend his time making Downtown better rather than fighting.

Danielle Casey, president and CEO of the economic development organization Albuquerque Regional Economic Alliance, said "there is no one central solution" to improving Downtown, and she believes it will require "a combination of a lot of tools."

Keleher said that while he and Peterson aren't in alignment with their methods, they both want Downtown to be better and know something needs to change.

"I just want Downtown to be filled with people living there, working there, shopping there," Keleher said. "I would like to see a vibrant, interesting Downtown that reflects all the great things we have going on in New Mexico."

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The Clyde Hotel in Downtown Albuquerque on Wednesday. Jim Long, who owns the hotel and the WaFd building, said he will support the new Business Improvement District. CHANCEY BUSH/JOURNAL

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