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Downtown Merchants Seek To Form Improvement District

By Andrea Alegria - 10/26/2009

San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

Seeing an increased need for marketing and promotional efforts, members of the Downtown Glendale Merchants Association are supporting the creation of a Business Improvement District, which they say could bring much needed funds and resources into the area.

“The wise merchant understands that during grim times you need to do more in the way of advertising, marketing and outreach,” said Eric Olson, President of the Downtown Glendale Merchants Association (DGMA).

Founded in 2000 as a joint effort between the City of Glendale’s Department of Development Services and local merchants, DGMA is operated by a group of volunteers and has an annual budget of between \$15,000 and \$20,000.

“DGMA sponsors or co sponsors a number of events in the downtown area but our ability to carry these things out rests on the time and energy of a few volunteers and not a lot of money,” said Olson.

A Downtown Glendale Business Improvement District would provide the downtown merchants with personnel and resources to develop business assistance programs, marketing campaigns, and address security issues and maintenance concerns among other things, said Economic Development Manager Ken Hitts.

All operations would be financed through annual tax assessments that would substantially increase revenues.

“We’re talking about a quantum leap here,” said Olson, who is a partner in the law firm Baker, Olson, LeCroy & Danielian,

“I think our people are really excited to have something up and running that will really enhance our ability to do any number of things for the benefit of our businesses.”

The process to create a BID is just getting off the ground.

Hitts said the city is in the process of interviewing consultants and will select one in the coming days, which will then be tasked with putting a plan together and flushing out the details of how the new BID would work.

Boundaries would have to be determined as well as who would be assessed (whether the property owners or the merchants) and how those revenues would be used.

“This is really the next logical step in what we need to do to improve marketing, beautification and safety in the downtown corridor business district,” said Elissa Glickman, Director of Marketing and Resource Development for the Alex Theater, one of the businesses located in what is called the Mid-Brand Area on Brand Boulevard, which has been a major focus for revitalization since 1991.

According to Glickman, the creation of a BID would provide new marketing and promotional opportunities for the area, and also allow for the development of new arts venues and programming that could also increase foot traffic.

If all goes well, and once a plan is put together and goes through a voting process, the merchants expect to have a functioning BID up and running as early as July of 2010.

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