

Asheville City Council May 14, 2024 Email Comments Received

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Hello Mayor and City Council Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for the establishment of a Business Improvement District (BID) for downtown Asheville. As a previous downtown commercial business operator and multi-building owner, I have seen firsthand the challenges and opportunities facing our downtown businesses. The company I helped start, Katie Button Restaurants, began on a shoestring during a recession. In our due diligence period selecting Asheville for the start of our small business, we recognized the opportunities Asheville could provide. It's not just a place to work but a place to enjoy the riches of our region.

I believe that a BID would be nothing but beneficial to our business owners, workforce, and visitors. *Downtown Asheville is the gem of WNC, and we need to do the work to make sure our gem doesn't tarnish.* We have seen many instances where our image has been tarnished by criminal activity and scary trash such as feces, used condoms/tampons, and used needles. We have areas of downtown where weeds are prolific, trees are unkept and gardens are void of flowers. Dangerous sidewalks with missing concrete/brick to walk upon that could benefit from new solutions. The immediate focus is to supplement city services with a focus on clean and safe but future years allow addressing so many other areas, beautification being a significant one.

Providing additional services above and beyond what our City can provide makes sense. A BID can be reactive and nimble, changing how resources are spent to enhance our city promptly, our city government struggles to respond to urgent needs. Our city needs to show it supports our downtown businesses and by doing so we can learn to trust one another. We all want Asheville to thrive! These businesses are asking to self-tax to establish a BID, to do exactly what BID means - improve our business district.

My partners and I were initial supporters of the proposed BID in 2012. Imagine what Asheville would look like if we had formed the BID back then. Let's not delay another year, *the work to be done is real and urgent*.

I urge you to vote in favor of the BID for downtown Asheville.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Liz Button

Founding Partner, Curate Bar de Tapas, and Katie Button Restaurants
Chair of Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Board Member Thrive Asheville

Your mind is like a parachute, it doesn't work unless it's open.~ Jordan Maxwell

5/12/2024 4:43:00 PM

Good morning Council, The Agenda Briefing clearly encapsulated this relationship between the BID and the City. Ben Woody's "dear in headlights" response to questions was not surprising to me as this was always the directive....the BID is between Council and the Chamber of Commerce; it has nothing to do with Staff or the City of Asheville Organizational Roadmap. I witnessed that firsthand while employed and able to read emails and hear discussions, back when this started in October. If the BID is a partnership, where is Chief Lamb and his endorsement for private security downtown? Please have him speak on Tuesday to highlight how this will be a proactive partnership for our downtown community. If the BID is a partnership, where is Greg Shuler and his endorsement for private sector cleaning enhancements? Please have him speak as to how the City will collaborate cleaning shifts, debris removal, wastewater safety protocol, etc. If the BID is a partnership, where is D. Tyrell and his endorsement for private sector programming and events? Please have him speak to how community will engage mutually with this entity to ensure residents are respected and valued during high tourist impact times. If the BID is a partnership, where is Jade Dundas and his endorsement for private sector capital improvements? Please have him speak to how funds will be aligned to tackle building/property deterioration in downtown. The BID is not a partnership. And to have this continued discussion is a blatant disregard for the root cause issue. The City of Asheville is severely understaffed, seeing devastating turnover and retention. The BID would not be needed if the City could adequately, efficiently, and effectively manage the City and serve the Residents through a robustly staffed organization. City Council is preparing to raise taxes and hand that money over to a private entity versus raising taxes to pay hard working City Employees. I truly don't understand that and wonder how you come to supporting a private sector entity versus the Public Servant sector, if you vote to pass the BID instead of raising taxes to pay employees enough to survive and thrive. AND recruit. All employment needs to be done fairly, equitably, and economically. Where is HR in all of this? Who is the HR Director? Who is the Transportation Director? Who is the Public Works Director? Please do not pass the BID. Please focus on what is happening within the organization. If you do pass the BID, ask yourself if you think APD/AFD staff will leave to work for the Private Sector security, that will likely pay more than the City, based on taxes you allowed to be given away. Retirement benefits won't keep Staff in place when they can't survive on current pay structures. Councilmember Turner wanted Council to look at Raleigh-Durham's BID structure. I think it's important to look at their APD pay as well. If Asheville paid Staff appropriately, would the BID be needed? (it's embarrassing to see the Asheville APD post....it's been posted since 2019. We have been failing to hire for FIVE years. WHERE IS HR?) Somehow, we are hiring 31 brand new positions, 7 of which are AFD... yet you ignored their (AFD) legitimate, sincere, devastating payroll increase request. It's wild. How does HR get 7 new AFD when current AFD is ready to quit. With kind regards, Allison