

# **DISTRICT PLAN for CENTRAL BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT**

**City of Albany, New York**

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**September, 1997**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Central Avenue Civic and Merchants Association (CAMA) is a local business organization that dates back to the 1930's dedicated to the promotion and economic vitality of Central Avenue in the City of Albany, New York. At the November 21, 1996 CAMA meeting, the topic of creating a Business Improvement District (BID) on Central Avenue was discussed. Alicia Fernandez, a staff representative from the City's Department of Economic Development spoke in detail about the benefits provided by this type of special assessment district. She explained the concept of intense management, funding, assessment and budget as well as stressing that the services provided by a BID are supplemental to those already provided by the City. Ms. Fernandez also presented two examples of established BID's in the City of Albany and how they have made a successful impact. The result of this discussion was a call by the members of CAMA to consider the establishment of the Central Business Improvement District initiative (CBID).

The CBID initiative was unanimously supported those in attendance and it was clear that a task force would have to be assembled and charged with the task of structuring a BID plan and building consensus for, and public awareness of the effort. The Task Force was to be sensitive to the contrasts in business climate that exists between the traditional commercial district located on the eastern end and the newer, suburban style development at the western end of Central Avenue. It was resolved that, in order for the older commercial section to thrive and for the newer developed section to continue growth, steps must be taken to assure that Central Avenue, as a whole, be committed to the CBID process and to develop and maintain a single identity.

At the December 17, 1996 CAMA meeting members decided to significantly broaden their horizons by actively seeking to enroll new members from the entire expanse of Central Avenue and the surrounding side-streets. A new contingent of officers was elected, including President Donald Metzner, President of Armory Garage, and Vice-President Austin Snow, General Manager of the Quality Inn Hotel. Mary Bintz of Fleet Bank was named Secretary and Tina Yavis of the Mayflower Restaurant was named Treasurer of the newly structured organization. The first three of these officers have businesses located in the more recently developed area of Central Avenue, or geographically, nearer to the western boundary of the district. CAMA, whose focus was traditionally on the dense urban landscape of the eastern end of Central Avenue, emerged into a larger association dedicated to the formation of a Business Improvement District, which would ultimately supersede CAMA.

The CBID planning process facilitated a vision for Central Avenue and it's environs. CAMA developed the following mission statement to guide it in its process:

*To promote the development of the Central Avenue business corridor, a major gateway and service center in the Capital City of Albany. To organize in order to do all things necessary and proper to make the Central Avenue business corridor more attractive for business and civic events and improve the quality of life for residents in adjacent neighborhoods. To this end, the creation of a business improvement district will work to enhance the public perception of the Central Avenue business corridor and empower an entity charged with managing the appearance, image, security, promotion, accessibility, advocacy, and cleanliness of the district.*

At the January 21, 1997 CAMA meeting, Ms. Fernandez explained in detail the successful impacts that BID's have had on City's and what a BID could do specifically for the CBID area:

- **Provide supplementary services for sidewalk clean-up and security**
- **Improve property values**
- **Improve aesthetics**
- **Improve the area's image**
- **Beautify the district**
- **Help attract new businesses**
- **Advocacy**
- **Promotion**

At the April 8, 1997 CAMA meeting Mr. Snow, Vice President of CAMA, agreed to lead in the development of the BID plan. With the support of the officers of CAMA, committee members, and representatives from various City departments, the planning process was launched with the designation of a working Task Force.

(Appendix A)

It was immediately clear to the Task Force that two things must occur before reasonable planning could proceed. First, a survey/questionnaire was distributed to ascertain the thoughts and opinions of those who own property and/or businesses in the area. Second, conduct a census of the proposed district to establish a current database of tenants and property owners. Both of these processes were commenced with the assistance of the Economic Development Department and the City Assessor's Office.

The **results of the survey** were as follows:

*(700 Distributed, 12% Return)*

The questionnaire was formulated to identify issues and concerns from those who live, work, and visit Central Avenue. The survey acts as a comprehensive framework that will be the lead factor in setting priorities for the CBID. Survey results indicated the following list of priority issues:

- **Safety**
- **Lack of a distinguishing positive image**
- **Dirty streets and sidewalks**
- **Parking**
- **Vacant buildings**
- **Lack of a quality, consistent marketing program**
- **Lack of strong, unified organization and management**
- **Poor lighting**

(Appendix B)

At the May 13, 1997 meeting, CAMA President Donald Metzner identified the need to have sub-committee chairs to lead specific components of the CBID planning process. Members of CAMA were encouraged to participate in the planning process by joining one or more of the sub-committees.

### Sub Committee

*Planning*

*Boundaries*

*Budget and Assessment*

*Parking*

*By-Laws*

### Chairpersons

Austin Snow

Dick Kirkland

Tina Yavis

Marcus Pryor

John Cunningham

Mr. Snow charged the committee chairs with their responsibilities and asked them to prepare for the June 10, 1997 public meeting which would disclose the process to the greater public and solicit more public input.

## **DESCRIPTION OF BID BOUNDARIES**

Of primary importance to the process was the establishment of a specific geographic area that defines the boundaries of the proposed BID. After reviewing various models submitted by the Boundaries Sub-committee, the BID boundaries were established as follows:

Central Avenue from Lark Street west to the City line; Colvin Avenue from Central Avenue to Lincoln Avenue; Russell Road from Central Avenue north to it's terminus; Everett Road from Central Avenue to Watervliet Avenue; Watervliet Avenue from Everett Road to Watervliet Avenue Extension; North Allen Street from Central Avenue to Lincoln Avenue; and Washington Avenue from Lark Street to Sprague Place. This area will be referred to as CBID.

(Appendix C)

## **PRESENT USES OF DISTRICT PROPERTY**

The area comprising the proposed CBID is a widely varied mix of business properties and a small portion of residential properties. For practical purposes, the CBID has been identified in three zones:

1. The eastern portion of the Avenue (Townsend Park to Ontario Street) is composed mostly of one, two and three story commercial and mixed-use structures, with the exception of a high-rise apartment complex. This area has a number of small minority owned businesses at the street level with a mix of office and residential use on the upper levels.

2. The middle portion of Central Avenue (Ontario Street to North Allen Street) has a similar character, with a small number of single/two-family residential units and two high-rise apartment complexes. This area of Central Avenue has a concentration of home improvement type retail.
3. The western portion of the Avenue is comprised of a small number of single/two-family residential units. The predominant commercial activity at this end of the Avenue is automotive dealerships (historically known as the "Central Super Auto Mile"). There are also three shopping plazas, big box retailers, and the typical suburban strip development fabric with fast food chains and quick lube shops.

## **ZONING**

The area is primarily zoned C-2 but there are portions zoned C-1, C-2, C-3, C-M, C-O, R-2B, R-4 and M-I. (C = Commercial, R = Residential)

(Appendix D)

## **PROCESS**

As a result of the survey, information provided regarding the BID concept, and presentations on the success of other BID's, the task force decided to conduct a pilot program over the summer of 1997 to demonstrate, at a small scale, the effects of district management.

CAMA created the Central BID Demonstration Program utilizing money raised from several local contributions. The funds were allocated to provide two services: a summer clean up program and uniformed, unarmed security staff patrolling the Avenue ("ambassadors"). The clean up crew facilitated a cleaning program for sidewalk maintenance and worked to create pleasant urban environment. The security personnel were assigned specific patrol-style tasks in an effort to deter crime by establishing a continuous presence on the street. To perform more efficiently, the ambassadors were equipped with cellular phones and 2-way radios with direct access to the Albany Police Department. This initiative was designed to be a one-time summer presentation, funded through the voluntary contributions generated by the various constituencies of Central Avenue.

The task force selected July 10, 1997 as a formal commencement date to the demonstration project and scheduled Central Avenue Clean-Up Day. The Albany Local Development Corporation and CAMA co-sponsored and organized the Clean-Up Day and with forty-plus volunteers pitching in to sweep sidewalks, pick up litter, clean out planters, and remove weeds.

(Appendix E)

## **FIRST PUBLIC MEETING**

June 10, 1997

President Donald Metzner called the meeting to order and gave a brief history of the Central Avenue Civic and Merchants Association dating back to the 1930's and how recent history in the Avenue corridor has created an atmosphere that is conducive to the creation of a business improvement district. Members of CAMA stressed the need for a successful improvement program for the corridor and introduced the BID concept and the Task Force's efforts to date.

Pam Tobin, Executive Director of the Downtown Albany BID, made a presentation regarding the programs and successes of the Downtown Albany BID. The Downtown Albany BID, in operation for 14 months, has made significant strides in revitalizing the City's urban core. Given the accomplishments of this BID, those in attendance reacted very positively to the notion of the CBID and CAMA was successful in generating more interest and commitment to the Task Force.

### **Concerns Raised at the First Public Meeting**

1. Attendees asked how the assessment worked and what the ramifications are if the BID assessment was not paid. Ms. Fernandez explained the assessment and collection process.
2. The question of a negative referendum was raised. The response by President Metzner was that the entire BID process is governed by State law and no individual BID can controvert legislation in this regard.

(Appendix F)

## **SECOND PUBLIC MEETING**

August 12, 1997

The purpose of this meeting was to make final recommendations on all aspects of the CBID Plan to the public. The agenda was as follows:

- I. Introduction & Central BID Mission
- II. What is a Business Improvement District?
- III. Boundaries, Assessment Rate, Budget
- IV. Budget Details
- V. BID Board of Directors
- VI. Legislative Process/Sunset Clause
- VII. Questions/Comments
- VIII. Other Business

The attendees at the meeting recommended and agreed that the CBID have a four (4) year sunset clause that will provide district members with the opportunity to re-establish the CBID.

(Appendix G)

## **SUMMARY OF DISTRICT PLAN BY-LAWS**

The BID's system of governance has been established within the By-Laws which were discussed, amended and adopted in a series of meetings, including the both public meetings.

(Appendix H)

In brief, the by-laws include the following:

1. Membership

The By-Laws provide for three classes of members of the corporation:

- a. Owners of record of real property (9)
- b. Tenants of commercial space (3)
- c. Persons serving by virtue of appointment as municipal representatives. (3)

Members of the Board of Directors representing the first two classes will be elected at the annual meeting of the membership. Of the fifteen members of the Board of Directors, by State law, one shall be chosen by the Common Council, one by the Mayor, and one by the Comptroller.

The remaining Directors, elected by the membership annually, are apportioned as follows:

- a. Nine (9) shall be owners of real property within the district.
- b. Three (3) shall be commercial tenants in the district.

Eight (8) votes will constitute a forum, except in the case of approval of expenditure of money, in which case nine (9) votes are required.

2. Staff

The By-Laws provide for the appointment of a district manager/executive director and describe the manager's responsibilities. In addition, the By-Laws outline indemnification and insurance provisions, require an annual report, and describe the procedures for submitting the annual budget to the Common Council.

## ASSESSMENT FORMULA

The BID's first year budget is based on the inclusion of approximately 447 taxable commercial properties within the district. With each of these properties assessed at two and one-half percent (2.5%) of the total assessed value, a first year budget of approximately \$350,675.00 has been established.

(Appendix I)



# CENTRAL BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

## *Year One Budget*

### **Estimated Revenue**

District Assessment at 2.5%	\$353,717
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### **Program Expenses**

Maintenance and Security	\$123,447
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Clean-up and Security	
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Equipment	
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Uniforms	
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Personnel/contracts	
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Image Improvement Program	\$40,359
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Banners	
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Landscaping	
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Vacant Storefronts	
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Lighting	
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Gateway Design Plan	
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(Colvin Ave., Everett Rd. & Townsend Park)	
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Parking	\$11,885
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Signage	
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Coordination	
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Marketing & Promotion	\$23,734
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### **Administration & Operations**

	\$100,880
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Staff	
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Office Supplies/Expenses	
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### **Contingency 15%**

	\$53,411
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## BUDGET NARRATIVE

It should be noted that the task force envisions standing committees will be established for each line item in the budget.

### Clean-up & Security

The maintenance, sanitation and security tasks will be supplemental to the services provided by the City. All on-duty personnel will be linked by radio to the police affording a rapid response by our staff who will serve as the "eyes and ears" of the district. Because of the linear nature of the proposed BID area (2.8 miles in length) the clean-up and security tasks will be combined. This will allow the CBID the greatest possible presence in the corridor while at the same time assuring us of both cleanliness and security for those frequenting the area. Since these people will be easily identifiable by their attire, people will be inclined to seek information from them just as they would from someone who is solely dedicated to walking a beat. Further, other BIDs have found that visitors do not exclusively seek out security staff for information, they ask their questions to whoever can be identified as being connected with the BID.

Proper training of personnel is the key to success in this dual role approach to the cleanliness and security. Therefore personnel will be fully trained in both of the areas they serve.

### Visual Improvements

Landscape improvements supplement the activities of the maintenance/security personnel by enhancing the perception of safety and cleanliness through lighting, landscaping, flowers and street banners. Combined they create a sense of identity and activity.

Prices for banners have been received and there are plans for more plantings and general grooming of the Avenue.

### Parking

The City's Department of General Services has already completely reworked the parking lot signs on the Avenue. These will be supplemented with maps of the Avenue corridor strategically placed in the area and by brochures available from businesses and other organizations in the corridor.

Some of the brick walls of the parking lots have been modified to incorporate some wrought iron work to make the lots more visible from the street. And further study is already underway with the City on improving other parcels to increase the total parking spaces available. Ongoing discussions with the City continue in an effort to maximize available properties for parking purposes.

## **Marketing and Promotion**

This will be the responsibility of the CBID Manager, with the assistance of the appropriate Board committee. They are responsible for organizing special events and promotions to attract shoppers and other visitors to the BID. In addition, the Manager will take steps to recruit businesses that will complement and/or supplement existing retail and service establishments in order to increase the draw of consumers to the area. The CBID will provide oversight regarding whatever negative perceptions impede better business in the CBID area and what should be done about such issues.

## **Administration and Operations**

The BID's Manager/Executive Director will be responsible for overseeing all contracts of the BID; including the clean-up/security program. The Manager will serve as staff to the BID's Board of Directors and the working committees which are established (e.g., Visual Improvements, Parking, etc.). The Executive Director will act as liaison with City Hall and generally serve as advocate for issues affecting the CBID. The Director will be supported by administrative and/or clerical staff. The location of the CBID office will be on Central Avenue within the boundaries of the CBID.

