

# MEMORANDUM



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TO: City Council Members

FROM: David Solberg, Deputy City Manager  
Carrie Riepl, Human Resources Director

DATE: Tuesday, February 11, 2025

SUBJECT: City Staff BID Relationship

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At the work session in January, and the public discussion last night, you heard a lot of emotional feedback from members of the Business Improvement Districts regarding several issues. Specifically, the inappropriate behavior and inaccurate comments of some BID members last night, while rare, are more egregious examples of conduct that has been directed toward staff at BID meetings. Staff has been meeting with the different BIDs over the past year+ timeframe and, at times, have taken inappropriate feedback regarding the problems you heard last night. The City has staff assigned to work with the BIDs to help them accomplish the goals they set for themselves each year and also self-assess themselves to fund them. I wanted to take this opportunity to thank our staff who work every day with the BIDs to help address some of the issues raised and do so in a professional, calm, positive manner. Regardless of the nature of the comments, or the tone of the comments, I have asked our staff to maintain the most professional and courteous nature while working with the BIDs, and we will continue to do so. I believe that as we approach the relationship with positive intent, our partners from the BIDs will also do so, and more progress can be made.

Most of the issues raised during yesterday's public discussion are ones that we are attempting to resolve positively: making procurement more understood, updating operating plans, budgeting, open meetings laws, and more. I feel that we have been taking three steps forward and then two steps back. I would like the City Council to know that city staff are working to achieve resolution to the issues we can with positive intent and determination.

Along with creating problems with accomplishing positive outcomes, hostile discourse creates a hostile work environment for city staff. Unfortunately, the disrespectful and disruptive behavior and actions of some of the BID members at last night's Council Meeting is not a one-time occurrence. Human Resources has met multiple times with employees who have been crying during the meeting or in emotional/mental distress as a result of interactions with some of the BID members. The lack of respect by some of the BID members for the City organization and its staff members and the disregard for City policies and State regulations have led to a hostile work environment for our employees. Some staff have felt unsafe in the environment, which has led to some staff resignations.

One key role of our HR department is to support our employees. In support of our employees, HR staff have attended BID meetings to attempt to find a solution. When HR staff were present at the meetings, the behavior improved, but there were still condescending remarks. We have tried to navigate this situation and improve the relationships by changing procedures and staff that work with the BIDS. However, at times, the behavior continues toward the new staff members assigned to assist the BIDS, which creates an environment where collaboration and trust cannot thrive. Some examples of the behavior include BID members using derogatory terms directed towards staff and the Council, interrupting staff when speaking, attacking the work of staff members, yelling at staff, insulting and belittling staff, intentionally violating City policies, and disregarding open meetings laws. Throughout all of this, our staff have remained composed, respectful, and professional.

Our staff appreciates the betterments that the BIDs make possible and recognizes the improvements downtown has seen over the past 40 years. Our staff wants to help the BIDs achieve the noble goals of their operating plans, which improve downtown not only for the businesses but also for everyone who visits downtown. Taking a calm, respectful, and positive approach will help turn the contentiousness that surfaces during meetings into positive progress forward.

Sincerely,

David Solberg  
Deputy City Manager

Carrie Riepl  
Human Resources Director