

Upgrades on Flagler

Seeking a Business Improvement District

BY CATHERINE LACKNER

By November, the Flagler Business Improvement District (BID) may join several other such districts in which business owners and residents tax themselves for quality-of-life improvements.

Gary Ressler, board member of Miami's Downtown Development Authority and principal of the Tilia family of companies, said several downtown stakeholders have been discussing creating such a district, which would extend from Biscayne Boulevard to the Miami River on the east and west, and from Southeast/west Second Street to Northeast/west Second Street on the south to north.

"There's been great community involvement," he said. "I've spoken to 40 owners and received only one negative response."

In its first year, the proposed BID would have a budget of \$750,000. The largest single allotment from the proceeds, \$175,000, would be spent on security, to hire off-duty police officers for foot patrols. Lesser amounts would go to main-

tenance, advocacy, administration and marketing.

"Security is our highest priority," said Terrell Fritz, a consultant hired to assess the possibility of creating the BID. "We'll also assist the Downtown Ambassadors and Neighborhood Enhancement Team," as well as help maintain the Flagler Streetscape improvements.

Owners could be assessed by taxable value, building and lot area, linear frontage, and other factors, according to a memo the group created. Each property would get one vote.

The next step is to get a resolution on the city commission's agenda, which the group hopes to do in July, and to win the commission's approval by September. A public meeting and appeal to the equalization board would be held in October.

The BID would be a 501(c)(6) not-for-profit corporation and its board of directors would comprise six property owners, four business owners, one resident and three Downtown Development Authority representatives, who would not have the right to vote.

"What would the BID do to

directly help businesses?" asked board chair Ken Russell, a Miami commissioner.

"As property owners, before we do marketing, we need to re-take the street," Mr. Ressler said. "We'd love to make economic concerns first."

Once security is established, the BID could put measures in place that would make it easier to do business downtown, he said. "Right now, there are six different companies picking up garbage on Flagler Street," which ties up traffic, he said. "We could negotiate one contract."

"As we've seen with the DDA, the city tends to pull back services" when there is another entity involved that is perceived to have money, said board member Jerome Hollo, vice president of Florida East Coast Realty. "You need to make sure they don't."

"We'll hold the city's feet to the fire," Mr. Ressler said.

It's best to establish a baseline of services now, as a basis of comparison before and after, said authority Vice Chair Neisen Kasdin, who is office-managing partner of Akerman LLP.