



CITIZENS FOR A GREATER DOWNTOWN ST. LOUIS

Press Release

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Citizens Group Urges Downtown St. Louis Property Owners to Reject Plan for a 20-Year Renewal of Community Improvement District

Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis (Citizens), a group of residential and commercial property owners, residents, and businesses, sent a letter today to all property owners in downtown St. Louis urging them to oppose a 20-year renewal of the current Community Improvement District (CID). The group has also unveiled a new website, www.citizensforagreaterdowntown.org that explains the shortcomings of the current CID and describes how a successful CID should operate. The current CID expires in December 2021 and the current CID is soliciting support for their renewal proposal from downtown property owners. In its letter, Citizens notes deteriorating conditions in Downtown St. Louis and the ineffectiveness of the current CID to address critical public safety, infrastructure, and other quality of life concerns that have led to stagnating property values, lack of growth, and damage to the reputation of downtown.

The current CID has no staff and has delegated its entire operation to a private not-for-profit, Downtown STL Inc. This has led to a lack of transparency in its operations and expenditures and a lack of accountability for results. The governance reforms suggested by the current CID in its renewal proposal are far less than what is necessary to make the organization successful.

This is a pivotal moment for downtown St. Louis. Deterioration of infrastructure, threats to public safety, and other conditions diminish the value of property and threaten the health and long-term future of the downtown neighborhood. The current CID has not engaged effectively in addressing any of these challenges.

Downtown can recapture momentum for growth by building upon new and exciting projects such as the soccer stadium, Ballpark Village Phase II and the future home of Square, but that will not happen without addressing basic quality of life issues downtown that discourage residential and commercial growth and damage downtown's reputation. That is the principal job of the CID – a job at which the organization has consistently fallen short.

"I think it's time for a change. As a longstanding owner in the Washington Avenue Loft District, I haven't seen any real improvement to the area within the CID. I've only witnessed stagnation coupled with more vacant retail. Fresh ideas to improve the quality of life in downtown are desperately needed. A new CID must not only be more effective, it must offer the transparency that all the owners desire," said Ken Aston, long-time downtown investor and real estate executive.

The future of our neighborhood will depend upon committed leadership and on how available resources -- financial, civic, and political -- are harnessed to address critical issues. A successful CID can facilitate exactly that kind of joint action, and on its website Citizens describes how to create such an organization. "*Citizens believes that an effective CID is essential so that property owners have a mechanism to work together to make downtown a better place for everyone who lives, works, and invests here. However, we need a very different kind of organization than has been in place for the last 20 years,*" said Les Sterman, a longtime resident of downtown and former Executive Director of the East-West Gateway Council of Governments.

The diverse group of people who have joined together to form Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis have invested considerable time and money in downtown and have demonstrated a continuing belief in the future of their neighborhood. But that positive future will only happen if government and civic institutions begin to recognize and actively confront the issues that threaten the long-term economic and social health of downtown St. Louis. That is not happening now, and we believe that will not happen if the CID is renewed for the next twenty years without the kind of major reforms recommended by Citizens.

"Having moved recently from Webster Groves to Downtown West, it became evident the focus and strategies of the current CID do little to effectively address obvious problems facing Downtown residents and businesses," said Arnold Stricker, a resident in downtown and member of Citizens.

It is our hope that by sharing our views with every property owner in downtown St. Louis, it will create an opportunity for genuine discussion about what we can all do to re-imagine the CID into a more robust and effective organization.

Go to the website www.citizensforagreaterdowntown.org to learn more about Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis and our proposals for a re-imagined CID.

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THE TIME IS NOW for a greater downtown!

