

From the St. Louis Business Journal:

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Downtown's taxing district picks leader from nonprofit it sought distance from

Oct 6, 2020, 8:41am CDT

Downtown St. Louis' taxing district said Monday it would hire as its first executive director an employee of nonprofit Downtown STL Inc.

Kelli McCrary, director of security and urban space for Downtown STL, will become executive director of the Downtown St. Louis Community Improvement District, effective Jan. 1.

The move comes after the CID said in April it would next year end its financial relationship with Downtown STL, which for years had been paid to perform services for the CID. The district, which collects about \$3.6 million a year in assessments, or extra property taxes, said then it would hire its own staff and focus solely on beautification and safety. Downtown STL, led by



SAM FENTRESS

The Gateway Arch in downtown St. Louis. The neighborhood's taxing district has chosen a new leader.

CEO Missy Kelley, was to narrow its focus to implementing a new plan for downtown and marketing.

That also came amid a fight over whether to renew the CID, which expires at the end of 2021. Disaffected property owners have criticized the district — and its affiliation with Downtown STL — as ineffectual, citing declining property values and, more recently, lawlessness amid the pandemic.

Downtown STL has pushed back on those assertions, saying the opponents have used "misinterpreted information to frame our work as inefficient."

The CID's board chair, St. Louis Parking Co. CEO Eddie Pohrer, praised McCrary in a statement Monday, saying since joining Downtown STL in 2017, "Kelli's passion for Downtown and intense focus to support and enhance our Downtown neighborhood, especially on safety and crime, was infectious."

A CID statement also cited McCrary's past work as director of safety and security for the Riverview Gardens School District, and a law enforcement and security consulting career spanning almost 26 years.

A CID spokesman didn't respond to questions about how much McCrary would make, or whether she lives downtown. When she took over leadership of Downtown STL, Kelley emphasized to press that she would live downtown. She said she later left, moving farther west in the city, to make it easier for her kids to get to school.

But Les Sterman, the former head of East-West Gateway Council of Governments who speaks for the opposition group, called Citizens for a Greater Downtown St. Louis, said Monday that the CID's latest personnel move shows the district will "keep doing the same thing they've always done."

"This is a separation that's more of an illusion than a reality," Sterman said.

Sterman said it should become clear by the end of the year whether the CID has enough signatures of property owners for renewal. Citizens for a Greater Downtown is advising owners not to sign.

Kelley, in a note late last month, said safety in downtown "continues to be our top priority."

Through August, total crime downtown was up 14.5% compared with 2019, according to the latest police statistics. In neighboring Downtown West, crime was up 17.6%.

Kelley said since new safety measures, including street barricades on weekends, were rolled out in late August, "documented incidents of violence and shootings have decreased significantly."

"Simply put, Downtown St. Louis is a much safer place than it was one month ago, and that is thanks to the hard work of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department, supplemented by our CID's secondary officers and bike police unit," Kelley wrote.

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