

## **OPINION: Property owner engagement drives support for MLK business district expansion**

With a rich legacy of nearly 3 decades the Historic King Drive Business Improvement District (BID 8) has been working to improve the district by fostering a culture of revitalization that have attracted local entrepreneurs who embrace the commitment to hard work and strong character that the area was founded on. Now experiencing an unprecedented growth in commercial and housing development the quality of life has never been better and continues to grow every day. The work to ensure equity, access, and opportunity continues, along with a supported vision to ensure the same investment and support visible in the south end of the MLK business district is equally visible and felt on the north end.

Efforts in the area led commercial property owners to petition the City of Milwaukee to expand BID #8. Property owners in the proposed boundary were sent invitations (postcards) to share feedback on the proposed expansion. Postcards were sent stating BID services, and listed days and times for 3 two-hour virtual meetings in June, and 3 two-hour virtual meetings in July with the executive director. Phone or email contact attempts were made to property owners not responsive to postcard mailings. Door to door visits were made to businesses in the proposed expanded boundary. The City of Milwaukee sent certified mail to affected property owners inviting public comments before or during the City Plan Commission. One in-person meeting was hosted for affected property owners on August 13 at King Hall, 3415 N Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. It was broadcasted virtually.

Property owners were also sent personalized letters from the BID that included proposed neighborhood improvement services and an estimated BID member fee. In brief, services referenced street cleaning, graffiti removal, technical assistance with building improvements, commercial tenant recruitment, incentive grants, and placemaking. With this information, the proposal expansion garnered strong support of property owners and businesses in the expanded boundary, and others.

On August 17, the City Plan Commission held a public hearing on the proposed expansion. After hearing all public testimony of those in opposition and support the Commission voted unanimously to approve file #200377. [http://milwaukee.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=2&clip\\_id=2406](http://milwaukee.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=2406)  
Documentation of opposition and support for expansion can be viewed here:  
<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4588273&GUID=298FDC98-E265-49F0-990E-ACA62748F1CF>

Residential property owners will not contribute financially to the work of the business improvement district. Neighborhood beautification, public space improvements and building enhancements are benefits residents can anticipate with the boundary expansion. In talks with residents of the 5 Points neighborhood, support for the expansion exists along with a desire to work together to improve the area. Of more than 80 commercial properties to be added, 2 objections were voiced by property owners contributing to BID operations.

Misinformation and scare tactics can be used to bully people. Terms like gentrification, displacement and redlining can spark outrage, particularly in times we are living in. There is no evidence to suggest an expansion of the business improvement district at this time will cause these to occur. There is overwhelming evidence that show economic opportunities for men and women of color have increased in the MLK business improvement district in recent years. This includes new businesses opened, new grant programs offered, property redevelopments, and improving public spaces. Finally, with the documented support of property owners it is my hope to continue the work of improving our community and establishing the best King Drive in the nation. One we all can be proud of.

Deshea Agee is the Executive Director of Historic King Drive Business Improvement District #8, and a resident in the Rufus King neighborhood