

Industrial Companies Seek 30th Street BID

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A group of industrial companies and property owners on the north side of Milwaukee is hoping to attract future growth to the area by creating a new business improvement district (BID).

The 30th Street Industrial Corridor Corp., which covers a neighborhood along the old Soo Line Railroad tracks from Congress Street on the north to Highland Boulevard on the south and North 36th Street on the west to as far east as North 12th Street, contains some of Milwaukee's oldest industrial firms.

The area has lost many of its industrial employers over the past 40 years. However, it retains several others, including DRS Technologies, Eaton Corp. and Master Lock.

The Milwaukee Common Council could vote to create the BID on Oct. 18.

Members of the 30th Street ICC say the new BID will help them market the area for new development.

"The 30th Street corridor, as with other central city areas, can be a tough sell (for businesses)," said Tim Casey, vice president of industrial with Wangard Partners and ICC board president.

When businesses in a specific area form a BID, they agree to levy special assessments on themselves to pay for streetscape improvements, branding and marketing efforts. Some of Milwaukee's BIDs have been able to secure city dollars for improvement projects.

Casey said the creation of a 30th Street BID would help "bring more resources to the table."

The 30th Street ICC's BID will help pay for graffiti removal and improve safety and security for industrial employers in the area, Casey said.

The proposed BID's boundaries are West Ruby Avenue on the north, North 35th Street on the west, West Brown Street on the south and North

26th Street on

the east. The district's boundaries are jagged and do not move in straight lines.

Included in the BID area is the 148-acre Tower Automotive site, which is largely vacant now. The new BID could play an important role in helping to redevelop the site, according to Casey and Brenna Holly, economic development planner for the 30th Street ICC.

"One of the things that's going to change the perception of the area is the redevelopment of the Tower campus," Casey said. "With 148 acres, it's really a site that has the critical mass to bring the next generation of development to the site. It's going to change the way you think about that part of the city."

When redevelopment of the Tower site begins in the next few years, the BID could be expanded to the Eaton and DRS campuses, Casey said.

The 30th Street ICC, formed in 1991, has about 50 businesses in its membership. The BID, once formed, would also work on some light landscaping and other decorative improvements which would give a uniform look to the area and improve marketing efforts, Holly said.

"It's taking ownership of the area," she said.

The ICC's membership has increased 15 percent in the last 18 months, Holly said. The organization's goal is to help create family-supporting jobs in the area.

There are many unemployed people in the area around the ICC that want to work, Casey said. That fact could seem as a detraction to some, but Casey thinks it will help attract new businesses.

"We have to start with the companies in the area," he said. "They know what it's like to do business here. They're dealing with the realities, not the stereotypes. We have to work on safety and security. And we have to get the sites that are prepared for redevelopment, and work with the companies that are looking for a labor force. There are companies looking for that, and we have an abundance of that here."

Rocky Marcoux, commissioner of the Milwaukee Department of City Development, said the formation of the BID is a step in the right direction for the ICC.

"I can't emphasize how important the BID is for moving forward," he said. "There has been a clear emphasis from the Common Council to fund projects put forth by BIDs. It tells the city they have a willing partner and you have put your money where your mouth is."

Redevelopment plans for the Tower site will be coming forward soon, Marcoux said, and may include a large tax incremental financing (TIF) district. He said redevelopment at that site, which is contained in the ICC's BID, will likely help spur redevelopment in and around the BID.

"I look at this as a grand opportunity," Marcoux said.

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