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Southwest Detroit businesses will pay to bring in shoppers

Tax increase for improvements is first approved in state

September 12, 2007

By **JOHN GALLAGHER**
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

In a first for Michigan, business property owners in southwest Detroit have approved the state's first Business Improvement Zone, more commonly known as Business Improvement Districts.

In a BID, businesses approve a small tax increase to pay for such services as security, cleanup, marketing and parking in their district.

Kathy Wendler, president of the Southwest Detroit Business Association, said about 200 property owners controlling about 300 parcels will be included in the district. The owners voted over the past 30 days, and the BID passed with 67% of the vote, Wendler said.

The district covered includes West Vernor from Clark on the east to Woodmere on the west, and Springwells between Vernor and the I-75 service drive.

"It's not rocket science," Wendler said. "Keep it clean and safe and comfortable and people shop there."

The extra tax amounts to 2% on top of the normal business property tax bill.

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BIDS are widely accepted elsewhere, but antitax advocates and other critics in Michigan have managed to stymie approval of BIDs here. Windsor has nine separate BID districts, and New York and Los Angeles have approved about 50 each.

Advocates of BIDS hope the approval in southwest Detroit will encourage the creation of BIDS elsewhere in the city.

"Everyone is very interested in how we did it, are we successful," said Theresa Zajac, program director for the new district.

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