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West Vancouver considers business improvement area

Ambleside, Dundarave businesses rally for support

[Brent Richter](#) / North Shore News

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Business owner and director of the Ambleside & Dundarave Business Improvement Association Gordon Holley is leading the charge to establish a business improvement area in Ambleside, Hollyburn and Dundarave. The BIA would charge commercial property owners an annual levy and use the funds to promote the area. Photo Mike Wakefield

A group of West Vancouver business owners are hoping the establishment of a business improvement area will help turn the tide of flagging commerce in Ambleside, Hollyburn and Dundarave.

Members of the Ambleside & Dundarave Business Improvement Association made the pitch to District of West Vancouver council Monday night. Should the BIA be launched, owners of all the commercial properties within the area's defined borders would have to pay an annual levy based on the assessed value of their property.

Association director Gordon Holley said the money would go towards hiring full-time staff, marketing the area locally, regionally and in tourist markets, retail promotion, holding special events, and beautification projects, as chosen by the BIA's elected board of directors.

The BIA would also serve as a voice for business to lobby council as well as work with landlords to help lure desirable new tenants to vacant storefronts.

"...We've been told by our merchants that business is steadily declining or not picking up. It's at least flat and it's becoming a real concern to the merchants. We're seeing too many vacancies on Marine Drive and Bellevue," Holley said. "Business owners have told us directly that they feel frustrated with the lack of progress on the issues that have been identified — alone and unsupported in many ways, without a strong voice in municipal matters and excluded from the decision-making processes that affect their businesses."

In this case, the association is seeking a levy in the range of 80 cents to \$1.09 for every \$1,000 of assessed value or \$600 to \$900 per year for a 1,500-square-foot retailer.

For tenants in multi-unit buildings, the levy is typically distributed through the lease agreements with landlords

based on their size and use of common property

Council members were largely receptive to the plan — if the association can demonstrate the rest of the business community along the Marine Drive corridor is on side.

“I would be hugely disappointed if this doesn’t go ahead and I strongly urge the business community to take a good look at this because if we continue to do what we’ve always done, we will continue to get what we always got and we need to do something,” said Coun. Mary-Ann Booth.

Mayor Michael Smith agreed.

“Obviously, I think this is years overdue,” he said.

The association and its board of directors is now consulting with the rest of the businesses in the proposed BIA.

Council is expected to vote in the fall on whether to hold a “petition against” — a sort-of reverse referendum in which the BIA will be established unless more than 50 per cent of the property owners representing more than 50 per cent of the assessed value register opposition to the plan within 30 days.

Almost all of the province’s 50 business improvement areas have been set up with that process.

At least one business owner showed up to resist the plan. Lin Rockwell, who owns Phoenix and Romantique in Ambleside, gave her “victim impact statement” to council, saying things aren’t so dire for area businesses, and that the BIA levy would have a massive impact on her bottom line.

“Like a lot of other small business owners, I work seven days a day. I put in long hours. I’ve survived this long in tough times because I know what I’m doing. I don’t need a small group of people who do not know or understand my business taking my money and spending it on what they think is good for us,” she said.

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