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Special taxing district considered for Grove area

By [Jim Merkel](#)

In the three years he's owned the Atomic-Cowboy bar and restaurant on Manchester Avenue in the Grove district, Chip Schloss has seen at least a dozen bars and restaurants open up within three or four blocks.

The stretch around Manchester from Kingshighway Boulevard to east of Vandeventer Avenue, which was filled with block after block of vacant and boarded-up storefronts not that long ago, is rapidly coming back, he said.

"It's been a successful tool that's been utilized downtown and South Grand," Schloss said. "The central corridor of Manchester's been blighted so long it needs a lot of attention."

Now he said he's ready to take the next step of digging deeper into his pocket to pay \$565 a year for an assessment on his bar for a proposed special taxing district that would fund security, promotion and other purposes for the Grove area of the Forest Park Southeast Neighborhood.

He's one of a majority of property owners in the area of the proposed Grove Community Improvement District who signed a petition approving its creation and would be one of its 11 board members.

The Board of Aldermen may take final action at its meeting July 11 to approve the district.

Under the informal "aldermanic courtesy" rule, under which aldermen allow other aldermen to do what they want in their own wards, passage of the bill is almost a certainty.

The new district would collect an estimated \$108,000 a year from a property assessment and could collect about \$142,000 a year in a one-cent sales taxes if the board approves it.

Already, a loose organization of restaurants called the Grove Merchants Association is doing the same kind of thing. This subcommittee of the Forest Park Southeast Business Association provides security and picks up trash through a grant from the Missouri Department of Transportation meant to fight the effects of the closing of Interstate 64, Schloss said.

Fifty-four percent of the property owners in the proposed district signed the petition asking for its creation. Those property owners accounted for 85 percent of the assessed valuation of property within the proposed district.

There had to be majorities of both property owners and owners of a majority of properties before the Board of Aldermen could approve the district's creation.

But not everyone supports the district. Among the opponents is Dan Corbin, a piano tuner who owns two storefront-residential properties in the 4100 block of Manchester.

Corbin is a 30-year resident of the area and calls the proposed district unethical and immoral.

"If they want it, let them pay for it," Corbin said.

Rather than increasing property values, it would decrease them by adding taxes, Corbin said.



[Erica Burrus](#) photo/ Chip Schloss of the Atomic Cowboy in The Grove, stands in front of his business. He says a proposed new Community Improvement District in his area would help make his neighborhood safer.

Alderman Joseph Roddy, D-17th Ward, who represents the area and sponsored the legislation, said this would help in the effort to revitalize the area after it's been on the downturn for 50 years.

"After many years of effort, that revitalization is occurring," Roddy said. "On any Friday or Saturday evening, the place is really packed. It's been a wonderful thing to watch."

However, Roddy says security is still an issue.

"All we need to have is a couple of high-profile crimes down there and we'll see this thing melt down," Roddy said.

Among the speakers who discussed the bill at a meeting of the Board of Aldermen's Ways and Means Committee last week was Dan McGuire, a former alderman who now represents Amrit and Amy Gill of Restoration St. Louis, which has bought numerous properties in the district and is restoring them.

McGuire, who would sit on the district's board, said the Gills approve of its creation.

"It's a way that those involved tax themselves for benefits to themselves," McGuire said.

The Washington University Medical Center Redevelopment Corp., would help with administrative services for the district, said its executive director, Brian Phillips. That group has worked for a number of years to revitalize the area.

Security would take up a little more than 50 percent of the budget and could include hiring part-time, off-duty police officers, lighting and signs, Phillips said. The assessment also could pay for promotion of the area and other costs.