

# DAILY NEWS

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## Rudy's Foolish Bid to Cuff Biz Districts

Around the world, heavy-handed government is in retreat - except, apparently, in New York. Last week, the Giuliani administration imposed new rules that will undermine the innovative and effective work of the city's 39 business improvement districts. The new rules require the BIDS to get the approval of municipal bureaucrats before launching new initiatives. The BIDs even have to get clearance before talking to a city agency.

Thus the concept of "reinventing government" has been expanded. New York-style, to include micromanaging the day-to-day activities of local non-profit organizations that have been vital to the resurgence of Times Square, Harlem's 125th St., downtown Brooklyn and many other areas.

The BIDs are financed by taxes imposed on local property owners. They come in all sizes and shapes, from the imperialistic Grand Central Partnership, with a budget of more than \$10 million, to the modest North Flatbush Ave. BID, with a budget of about \$100,000.

The BIDs spend most of their money on street safety, sanitation and promotion of community activities and businesses. Contrary to the rhetoric emanating from City Hall, the BIDs already report to the Department of Business Services - an agency that is, by the way, unprepared to carry out its new job of monitoring and approving BID initiatives.

The city says it's imposing the new red tape to "improve the operation and management" of the BIDS and to farther "their positive impact." Right.

The truth is that many elected officials have come to resent the autonomy and success of the BIDs - and for good reason: Property owners no longer depend solely on politicians to address their needs.

Local merchants and businesses now have a choice when a problem arises. They can complain to an elected official, or they can contact the local BID.

For the first time in years, we have competition at the community level, not between political parties, but between elected officials and the BIDs. Just as the city's nine community boards serve as a voice for residential groups, the 39 BIDs demystify government procedures and policies for local businesses and property owners. And the BIDs are often more resourceful than City Council members, state legislators or other pols are.

As every New Yorker knows, government doesn't always respond to the day-to-day needs of its citizens. That's why BIDs are essential; they know how to get things done and have the capacity to mobilize city agencies to respond to local priorities.

Example: Four police precincts have jurisdiction over the 14th St.-Union Square area. In fact, the precincts covering the north and south sides of Union Square Park operate on different radio

frequencies. One of the notable accomplishments of Rob Walsh, former executive director of the 14th St.-Union Square BID, was to get these precincts to coordinate their activities.

The best BIDs don't work alone: they are in constant contact with public agencies and have established close ties with the talented professionals who want to improve the quality of life in the city despite Civil Service rules, budget constraints and a web of bureaucratic obstacles.

For instance, some BIDs have hired workers to clean parks during the late afternoon hours after most park employees have finished work but when there is still lots of activity, especially in playgrounds. Other BIDs have hired part-time workers to empty trash baskets in areas that get heavy tourist traffic at night and on weekends.

The BIDs have emerged as an essential element in the fabric of New York. They are adept, agile, creative and responsive. Government should certainly prevent any abuse of power, but these new regulations will do more harm than good.

The city should encourage its BIDS, not slap on handcuffs.

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