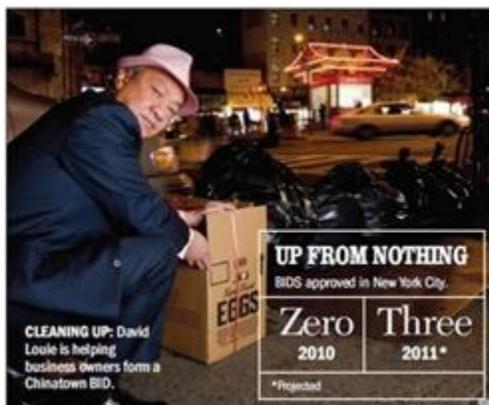


**November 28, 2010**

## **More businesses see BIDs as antidote to hard times**

**Three new districts in works; 4 others seek to expand**

By [Amanda Fung](#)



*Buck Ennis* [\[+\] Enlarge](#)

Hudson Square in lower Manhattan has come a long way in recent years, as ad agencies, media firms and others have replaced the printers that once dominated the area.

But it wasn't until last year, when local businesses banded together to form a business improvement district, that Hudson Square finally got noticed. The BID adorned the area with promotional banners and planted trees along its corridors.

“We helped put Hudson Square on the map,” says Ellen Baer, president of the Hudson Square Connection BID, which just last week tapped a team of seven leading urban designers to give area streets and squares a pedestrian-friendly makeover.

Today, business owners in two nearby neighborhoods, SoHo and Chinatown, are hoping to follow in Hudson Square's footsteps by forming their own BIDs, as is another group along Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. In addition to those three, four existing BIDs—NoHo and the Lower East Side in Manhattan, and two in Brooklyn—are hoping to expand. Others, like Myrtle Avenue in Queens, are just in the “thinking about it” stage.

After more than a year without any creation or expansion, BIDs are suddenly hot.

“The fact that we have an economy that is not doing so well is all the more reason to have a BID to generate more business in the area, and to get more tourists and shoppers down here,” says David Louie, chairman of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of New York.

But forming a BID can take years. It is a process that begins with business and property owners coming together and agreeing to pay the annual assessments. Once all that is done, the proposed BID needs to win the nod of the City Council and mayor.

## **Broad spectrum**

The city has 64 BIDS. They range from the 180th Street BID in Jamaica, Queens, which has a part-time director and an annual budget of just \$53,000, to Manhattan's Downtown Alliance, with a staff of 53 and a budget of \$14 million.

“Most BIDs start out aiming for clean and safe; then they start to evolve to offer other services,” says Jeremy Waldrup, assistant commissioner for district development at the city Department of Small Business Services, which helps businesses form BIDs.

Among those that started small are several of the largest BIDs in the city, including the Times Square Alliance, which was founded in 1992, as well as the Bryant Park Corp. and the 34th St. Partnership.

“Bryant Park and 34th Street were in crisis—Bryant Park recorded a massive number of crimes, and 34th Street was ankle-deep in litter,” says Dan Biederman, president of both BIDs. He notes that today those problems have been addressed, and shoppers and tourists are back in force.

Chinatown hopes to mimic that success. There, business owners have united as a four-year, \$5.4 million grant from the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. for trash removal comes to an end. Without that help, area merchants face a potential avalanche of fines.

Suddenly, the annual BID fee of \$200 to \$1,000 that would be paid by area businesses looks like a bargain compared with sanitation tickets that run \$100 each.

Clean streets are also a top priority along lower Broadway, which lies in the proposed SoHo improvement district running from Canal Street to Houston Street.

For 18 years, sidewalks there have been swept by the Association of Community Employment, a nonprofit that trains the homeless using donations from local stores. But as the mix of retailers shifted toward national chains, funding shriveled by 75%, to just \$25,000 this year, according to Henry Buhl, ACE founder and co-chair of the steering committee behind the SoHo BID.

## **Making it mandatory**

With voluntary contributions no longer adequate, business owners decided to form the BID and to require them.

“ACE said it would have to discontinue service,” says Brian Steinwurtzel of Newmark Knight Frank, the landlord of two buildings on lower Broadway.

Similarly, the proposed BID that would cover Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue, from Fourth Avenue to the waterfront, is in many ways a product of the area's recent success. Trader Joe's moved in two years ago, and a Barneys Co-Op opened just a few weeks ago.

Now local business owners want to build on that momentum to boost the strip's profile and draw more foot traffic. Marketing and beautification efforts, including holiday lights, top the businesses' wish list.

“BIDs provide the strongest voice for the community,” says Elizabeth Crowell, owner of a local gift shop and co-chair of the steering committee for the proposed district. “They get things done.”