

BUSINESS GROWTH IN CITY

New Design District Receives Support

By Kurt Helin
Editor

Organically, a new Design District — filled with graphic design studios, architectural firms, product development firms and more — has sprung up in Long Beach.

Now the Redevelopment Agency plans to help it grow.

This week, the RDA board approved an implementation plan for the Long Beach Design District, which lays out a series of steps that can start now and run for a decade to help grow this pocket of business in Long Beach.

That pocket of design businesses has sprung up in the last couple of years in the industrial neighborhoods north of Anaheim just west of Redondo Avenue, said Ken Fisher of the East Anaheim Street Business Alliance, which represents this area and has helped it grow.

"There's plenty of room in that area," Fisher said. "There are a lot of historic warehouse spaces that they can gut the inside but keep the historic exterior."

That's what has happened at a lot of places, particularly along Coronado Street, which has

been the core of the district. These are interesting older buildings that provide some style and allow room for creativity for the design firms to have a unique work space.

Similar design districts have been successful from Los Angeles to Miami, with architects, construction companies, interior design firms and others forming a symbiotic relationship. The report and plan given the RDA board considered what had happened in other areas. It also had reached out to the existing design businesses in Long Beach to see what they wanted in this new district.

At the heart of those suggestions is to continue with what has worked so far. The plan calls for small steps to let the growth of the district happen over time rather than seek big moves that could change the dynamic and character of what is already working.

One thing that has worked is that the businesses like that they can get big, historic and workable spaces at an affordable price, the study said. Also, many of these studios have clients in both Los Angeles and Orange counties, so being in centrally

located Long Beach is an advantage.

What the report does call for is an effort to bring more awareness to the public about the area, through public relations and other efforts. That can both help the existing businesses and attract other design-related businesses that may be looking for a new home to check the area out, officials said.

There could be some zoning changes to support the district. The goal of those changes should be to keep the district close to what it is now — not allowing high-rise buildings, for example. Also, there should be little or no residential, and what would be there should be live/work spaces for graphic designers or others who work in the design fields, the study says.

Of course, one seemingly inescapable issue in Long Beach is parking, and the report has suggestions on ways to add on-street parking in the area to help the businesses.

Zoning and parking changes will require approval of other boards and groups before anything is done. The study seeks to provide a framework for those changes.