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Downtown STL COO leaves after 6 months

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Downtown STL Inc. COO Christopher Ave has left the organization after six months on the job.

Ave, who began at the nonprofit in July, said he left at the end of January.

"I have nothing but appreciation and best wishes for the organization," Ave said. He declined to share any future plans. He previously worked as an editor at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch since 2008.

A Downtown STL spokesman didn't respond to a question about who would assume Ave's duties. The organization has seven employees, including CEO Missy Kelley, according to its website. It brought on Trey Buffington as economic development director in November.

Ave exits at a critical time for the organization, as it fights to renew a taxing district that provides most of its funding.

A group of downtown property owners said late last year that they'll work to end the district, called the Downtown Community Improvement District, if a renewal process led by Downtown STL did not change. One area of concern is the CID's expenditure of \$250,000 on consultants to help with renewal.

An owner, Amos Harris, said the process is inherently conflicted because the consultants report only to the CID and Kelley. Another, an entity tied to Brad Waldrop, is suing over the consultant expenditure, calling it illegal.

CID officials say they were within their legal rights and have done a good job for the neighborhood. Downtown STL is also working on a new plan for the neighborhood, set for completion this year.

The taxing district, which collects about \$3.6 million per year in assessments, or extra property taxes, is set to expire at the end of 2021.



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Christopher Ave

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