

Dear Property Owner:

This letter is to inform you that the board of directors of the South Orange Village Center Alliance ("SOVCA") is seeking approval from the South Orange Board of Trustees ("BOT") to expand the boundaries of the South Orange Special Improvement District (SID) to include your property. As an initial formal communication to the property owners in the expansion part of our district, we are writing to explain the rationale for expanding our district at this time, and to offer you an opportunity to comment on the proposed expansion before the ordinance to expand our district is introduced by the BOT.

On March 12, 2012, the South Orange BOT adopted Ordinance 2012-01 which created the SID within our central business district (also known as our Village Center) and also created SOVCA as a nonprofit organization to manage the district. The goals of the SID are to beautify and clean the district, to market our Village Center through social media, public relations, advertising and special events, to recruit and retain businesses and to advocate for the needs of our Village Center.

The enclosed map shows the current boundaries of the improvement district as well as the expansion area that would comprise our new boundaries. We strongly believe that, with the advent of the new development that is coming to our area as well as development that is being proposed, now is the right time to expand our district to include these properties so that they too can receive the same benefits from being in the SID that the rest of our district receives. Those benefits are numerous and include, but are not limited to the following:

**Cleanliness:** SOVCA has contracted with Commercial District Services, a company that specializes in supplemental cleaning and maintenance services for special improvement districts in New Jersey. Within our current boundaries, we have a professional cleaning staff that visits the area twice a day on weekdays and once a day on weekends to maintain our trash receptacles, clean our sidewalks, curbs and streets and help maintain our street furniture. As a result, our Village Center has become much cleaner and more attractive for shoppers, visitors and residents alike.

**Marketing:** SOVCA promotes the South Orange Village Center through a vibrant website, active social media accounts, print and online advertising and public relations campaigns. In addition we produce numerous special events throughout the year that bring thousands of residents and visitors alike to our downtown, including our new annual outdoor family event PlayDay, Halloween Festival, Hometown Holiday, Small Business Saturday, Pop 'n Shop pop up store, our Downtown After Sundown summer concert series and our Farmer's Market. We also provide holiday lighting throughout our district.

**Streetscape Improvements:** In 2015, SOVCA added 30 new trash cans and 10 new recycling cans to our district, replacing twenty year old receptacles that were in terrible shape. In 2016, we will be adding banners throughout our district promoting our Village Center, and we are developing a new plan for revitalizing Spiotta Park.

**Business Recruitment and Retention:** SOVCA has an active business recruitment program which includes holding special events for commercial brokers as well as conducting and disseminating survey research for landlords to use to help attract retail tenants. Numerous new businesses have opened or are planning to open in our district as a partial result of our efforts.

**Support and Advocacy:** SOVCA works on behalf of landlords and commercial tenants as a liaison with Village Hall, helping property owners and business navigate their way through the government and the municipal code. SOVCA is also taking the lead by establishing a Business Code Review Task Force which will act as a springboard for the BOT to revise our code to make it much more business friendly. In addition, SOVCA worked with the BOT to create a new grant program which will allot \$25,000 in the first year for storefront improvements made by either property owners or businesses.

SOVCA's primary sources of revenue for its operations is from special assessments that are levied on the properties within the district's boundaries and funding from the BOT. In the current 2015 budget, SOVCA collected \$64,483.72, or 22.3% of our \$287,875 operating budget from special assessments. SOVCA also collected \$160,075 or 55.6% of our budget from BOT funding, and the remainder of our budget was received through special events, corporate sponsorships and private donations.

The net taxable valuation of all of our collective properties this year was \$131,599,400, and our properties paid a special assessment rate of \$.049 per \$100 of valuation. This means that, for example, a property that has an assessed value of \$5,000,000 would pay \$245 this year to the SID.

The proposed SOVCA budget for 2016 calls for a total assessment of \$82,000 among all the properties, including the properties in our expansion area. It is not possible to predict with any certainty what each property's assessment will be for 2016 because, at this date, our budget has not yet been approved by the BOT nor has the expansion area been approved or even introduced yet. However, in 2015 the median assessment (meaning 50% of the properties paid more and 50% paid less than this number) is \$354.61. We can say that larger properties with higher assessed values would certainly pay a higher assessment than smaller properties with much lower assessed values. Properties that are completely residential are exempt from paying an assessment. It should also be noted the ordinance we will be asking the BOT to introduce will place a cap at 20% of our total assessment, meaning that no single property will ever pay more than 20% of the total assessment, even if that property's valuation is higher than 20% of the total assessed value of the district.

We are sending all letters to the affected property owners by certified mail and ask that you **please comment on the proposed expansion by Friday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015**. You can let us know that you support or oppose the proposed new boundaries, ask questions, or otherwise comment on our proposal. The BOT will take your comments into consideration as they gauge the level of support from the affected property owners in deciding whether or not to approve any expansion. Additionally, we will be contacting each stakeholder in our expansion area individually to explain our proposal and answer any questions that might arise. We will also be conducting outreach through our local media to give all the affected stakeholders an additional way to find out about the proposed expansion.

Once again, **please send your comments to me by Friday, November 20<sup>th</sup>**. You can email them to me at [bob@sovillagecenter.org](mailto:bob@sovillagecenter.org), send them by mail to us at SOVCA, 76 South Orange Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, South Orange, NJ 07079, or call us at 973-763-6899. Thank you for your attention to this.

Sincerely,

Bob Zuckerman

Executive Director