

The Boston Globe

Big Dig panel broadens its focus

By Thomas C. Palmer Jr., Globe Staff

Page D3

May 9, 2006

The ABC is still the ABC -- just different.

The Artery Business Committee, organized to help keep Boston functioning during Big Dig construction, is changing its name to A Better City and widening its focus to include other transportation and development issues.

At a board meeting this morning, the 17-year-old nonprofit organization, made up of about 80 mostly downtown businesses, is scheduled to vote to seek a larger role in Boston's future.

It is adding nine universities and hospitals, including Harvard University and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, to its membership list.

"We're going to continue the Artery Business Committee, but in a better format," John E. Drew, a developer and chairman of the ABC, said yesterday.

As the 15-year Big Dig project wound down, the organization did a year of self-examination and engaged a consulting group for a \$50,000 study to consider whether it should close its doors at 75 State St.

"We got uniform agreement we should go forward," said Drew, who will step down at the end of 2006 after six years as chairman.

The ABC has already begun to promote projects like the Urban Ring, a tentatively planned circular transit corridor outside downtown.

It helped shape the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway and coordinated support for a \$750 million tunnel that would link the two Silver Line bus rapid-transit routes and connect Dudley Square to Logan airport.

"The ABC is one of the do-er groups," said Mayor Thomas M. Menino. "They roll up their sleeves and get involved."

With a \$1.2 million annual budget and seven employees, the ABC takes credit for helping to mitigate the disruptive effects of the \$14.6 billion Big Dig.

"During the peak of construction, we had some of the lowest office vacancy and lowest unemployment in the history of the city of Boston," said Richard A. Dimino, who will start his 12th year as ABC's president.