



June 3, 2019

Business Improvement Districts Fact Sheet

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are bounded geographic areas in which additional assessments are levied on businesses or property in order to fund security, maintenance, communication, and lobbying programs administered by private entities.

How do BIDs Operate?

The services, structures and funding mechanisms of BIDs vary across cities and even within cities. All BIDs, however, are established by local governments and rely on local governments to collect the assessments that they use for revenue. Local and state governments are paying assessments on publicly-owned properties, like parks and libraries, themselves. BIDs spend money on programs to manage public spaces in their geographic areas and replace local governments as the administrators of public spaces. As they take over the management of public spaces, BIDs criminalize and punish any activities that interfere with big businesses' and large land owners' profits. They are removing the expectation of public benefit from common understandings of what constitutes public space.

The creation of a BID usually requires the expressed written support of a percentage of landowners. Written support is weighted according to the amount of assessments that a landowner will pay, so the more land that they own the more their support counts and the more influence they have during the formation process. Individuals who do not own property or a business have no authority in BIDs' decision making. Government entities often support the formation of new BIDs before any public hearings have been held. They submit ballots and petitions on behalf of publicly-owned properties in support of the creation and renewal of BIDs.

What do BIDs do?

BIDs spend money on the following types of activities:

- Hiring armed and unarmed security officers, funding camera surveillance programs, coordinating with police departments, and contracting with police for additional police presence.
- Drafting and promoting legislation that privatizes community space for business interests and criminalizes poor and homeless people. They lobby local and state legislators to push legislation that supports the targeting, harassment and exclusion of homeless people, poor people, street vendors, and buskers from their districts.

- Opposing legislation that seeks to protect street based people from criminalization, including legislation that would overturn sit-lie ordinances.
- Controlling the architecture and aesthetics of the district by creating parklets, holding festivals, and cleaning public spaces.

BIDs in multiple cities hire police officers assigned specifically to their districts. The BIDs are allowed to oversee these officers and, in at least one district, have a say in which offers are chosen for the assignment. BIDs pay the police bureaus directly, and any officers contracted through this process are provided in addition to regular levels of police.

Most BIDs also contract with private security firms. Armed and unarmed officers patrol BID districts seven days a week, either on foot or bike, generally from 7 am - 9 pm. Private security work with police to move people out of their district; referring to folks using their real names or street names and tracking their behaviors. BID security are encouraged to deter behavior like sitting, lying, and panhandling by focusing patrols on certain areas and harassing folks verbally.

TAKE ACTION – What You Can Do:

With BIDs playing an increasingly greater role in controlling our public spaces in our cities and states, and in creating laws that criminalize poor and homeless people, it's important to take action and say NO to BIDs!

- Tell your local government:
 - Stop all public funding of BIDs
 - Ask for the immediate disbanding of BIDs
 - Cancel all special agreements with BIDs
 - Demand more public oversight
- Document (video, photos, take notes) incidents of BID harassment of vendors, poor people, buskers, homeless people, and send your documentation to wrap@wraphome.org and your local groups fighting BIDs.
- Ask your local business if they support BIDs. If they do not, ask them if they would be willing to put signage in their windows. If they support BIDs, don't patronize their business!



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