



San Francisco BID Fact Sheet

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What is a BID?

Over the past several decades Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have been greatly expanding across California, and they have acted to criminalize the presence and activities of poor people in public spaces. A BID is a special, legal subdivision of the city. BIDs are funded by city collected assessments on property, including properties owned by the city and non-profits. The BIDS use these funds with very little public oversight.

BIDs expanding across San Francisco.

- \$16,000,000 in tax assessments are going to BIDs every year.
 - This number will continue to grow.
- There are currently 16 BIDs in San Francisco that control over 350 full and partial blocks across our city.
- The city decides its position on forming new BIDs without proper public input. The Board of Supervisors has repeatedly submitted petitions in favor of forming new BIDs on behalf of city property before any public hearings. They also pass resolutions declaring their intent to form new BIDs before any public hearings. To date the city has never voted against the formation of a new BID.

What do BIDs do and how are they formed?

- Only property owners and local and state governments are allowed to submit petitions and ballots in elections on the formation of BIDs.
- Petitions and ballots submitted in elections on the formation of BIDs are weighted relative to the size of the assessment that the parcel owner will pay if the BID is formed.
 - The larger a property owner's parcel the bigger their vote.
- In spite of this undemocratic process, elections on the formation of BIDs are tabulated by the San Francisco Department of Elections.
- The Board of Supervisors has augmented state legislation to benefit BIDs at the expense of communities. They have added residents and non-profits to the categories of taxable property owners and lowered the threshold for succesful petitions to form a BID from 50% to 30% of total proposed assessment fees.

BIDs spend money on the following types of activities:

- Security with ambassadors or private officers, patrol public spaces (sometimes armed and with the use of electronic security systems).
- Drafting and promoting legislation that privatizes community space for business interests and criminalizes poor and homeless people, and anyone who is not a consumer. 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 those that attempt to overturn sit-lie ordinances.
- Controlling the architecture and aesthetics of the district including creating parklets, holding festivals, and cleaning public spaces.

Many BIDs hire private companies to implement ambassador programs that provide districts with “safety, cleaning, hospitality, outreach, and landscaping services.” Ambassadors work on behalf of the BID and wear special uniforms to distinguish themselves from the general public and from local cops (even though sometimes they can be confused for cops). BIDs are also known to hire private security or in some situations retired cops, working hand in hand with local law enforcement. Some BIDs claim to offer services, outreach, referral and resources to poor and homeless people. However, in most cities, the needs of the poor far outnumber viable services so often that the outreach that BID employees provide is superficial to non-existent.



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