

Media Advisory: Audit of Enhanced Services Districts

For immediate release

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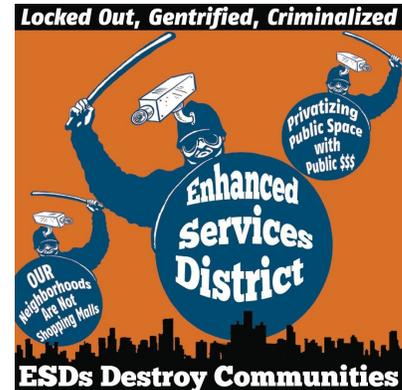
Western Regional Advocacy Project, Sisters of the Road and Right To Survive

On August 13, 2020, the City of Portland released an audit focused on the management of Portland's three Enhanced Services Districts (ESDs): downtown's Clean & Safe, Lloyd, and Central Eastside Together. The audit confirms what WRAP has long known: the City of Portland collects millions of dollars a year from property owners, only to hand this *public* money over to *privately managed* ESDs, who use funds to *privately* police *public* space--with nearly NO oversight, transparency, or accountability. Until now, there has never been an overarching audit of ESDs, and the Revenue Division collects no annual reports, budgets, or yearly audits. Yet, ESDs pay for four extra Portland Police Bureau (PPB) officers to patrol downtown, and they employ armed private security forces that bolster and parallel the PPB throughout downtown, the central eastside, and the Lloyd area.

The audit confirms what we feared the most: NO oversight of financial activity regarding police and private security and nearly NO oversight of physical activity by police and private security officers. Nearly all known records of oversight lie with the managing organizations themselves and business associations, law firms, consultants, and other private entities they contract with.

While the problems we outline here are highly specific to ESDs, our concerns far exceed the ESD program itself. The fact our local government allows ANY private entity to patrol, control, and dominate public space seriously undermines the ability for all community members to exist in our sidewalks, streets, parks, and plazas, which are supposedly open and accessible to all. The fact the City of Portland legally collects public funds and turns those funds over to private entities to facilitate the take over of public space is egregious enough. On top of that, to then refuse to hold those entities accountable for their actions, not to mention to refuse to even monitor their actions and use of public funds is a total capitulation of governmental responsibilities. Worst of all, city officials have *known* they are operating in this manner. The City refused to meaningfully respond to our public records not because they did not understand what we were asking for and why we were asking for it; the City did not respond because officials prioritize the neoliberal relationship between the City and its wealthiest landowners--who run ESDs--at its core. The system for accessing public records in Portland is one of the worst, most corrupt systems in the US, and everyone we encountered knew that when we finally exhausted the process of "asking" for information, our appeals and their denials would end up with the DA--who has contracts with the ESDs to enforce their control!

After 26 years of ESDs expanding their control over our city, it is way beyond "fixing". The whole concept of governing through corporatization of public space needs to be abolished, and structures



need to be put into place to ensure that public space is directly for the benefit of, and under the control of, the public--including those most vulnerable to abuse of power. It is also imperative that public records requests be responded to quickly, fully, and freely. Without such measures, even if abolished, ESDs will be back with a different name and a different face. We are opposed to private contracts for public functions, of any kind, without public approval and public accountability. We can start with ESDs but this issue is much bigger than that, and needs to be settled once and for all. Government should work FOR the people, all the people, so damn it--do it!