

PDXFTL7 - Enhanced Services Districts

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SPEAKERS

Piper, Josh, Kaitlyn

J Josh 00:02

Friends and neighbors, you're listening to Portland from the left, my name is Josh and I use he him pronouns.

P Piper 00:07

And my name is Piper, I use she her pronouns. And today we're gonna be talking to Kaitlyn about enhanced service districts in Portland.

K Kaitlyn 00:16

Hi, everybody. My name is Kaitlyn and I use she her pronouns. I have been organizing around Portland's enhanced services districts, both doing research and subsequently organizing against them. I work with a few different groups locally, I work with stop the sweeps Portland, stop the sweeps PDX, which is basically a collective of organizations and individuals both housed and unhoused, forming together to stop the sweeps. I also organize with a group called Western Regional advocacy project or WRAP is the acronym, which is a regional coalition of both homeless led and homeless accountable groups. It's based in San Francisco. But there are two Portland members, which is Sisters of the Road and Right to Survive. I bring up WRAP, mainly because WRAP has also been doing a lot of the work around doing research and organizing against business improvement districts across the country, which we'll get into later. But business improvement districts are what enhanced services districts are commonly called in other cities in the US. I've been in Portland for like the past like six or seven years, and have been kind of tracking a lot of the private security and mixture between both like public and private policing, and how that's used, really, to police, mostly poor and homeless people

P Piper 01:41

sort of starting from the beginning so that we can lay the groundwork, what is, what in Portland called, we call them an enhanced service district.

K

Kaitlyn 01:50

Yes. So an enhanced services district or ESD is the acronym you'll probably hear a lot is Portland's local version of what is known as business improvement districts in many other cities. It gets really confusing because they take on several different names. You'll hear in San Francisco, for example, community benefit districts, you'll hear things like Yeah. CBDs as what they're called. But you also hear just like similar variations, like business improvement areas. So basically what those are, is that's a geographically bounded district where all of the property owners in that district are required to pay a fee. And Portland, it's called a property management license fee. And that fee is then collected by the City, in Portland, it's specifically collected through the office of management and finance. And then that money is funneled to these enhanced services districts which are managed by different business nonprofits. So for example, Clean and Safe is the downtown enhance services district. So the city collects fees from downtown property owners, and then gives it to Portland Business Alliance, who is the managing organization of Clean and Safe. And then when they have that money, they really don't have any restrictions of what they can do with it. And typically, it will be put into increase private security, contracts with the Portland Police Bureau, contracts with the district attorney's office, marketing, they also usually have a cleaning aspect. So yeah, it's basically like enhance services in the area, and often it's used specifically against homeless people.

P

Piper 03:44

That all sounds very bad. But one thing that one thing that jumped out at me is that there's not really restrictions on what they can do with the money is you you said that the Portland Business Alliance is who is the manager of it? So can you explain to me a little bit more about that relationship? Because obviously, they're like the businesses paying into it. And you would think that they, at least they would have a say over what happens, if not even better, because it's a city project and city money, obviously, it would be better if the city had a say over what that was spent on. But how does that work? Like who makes the decisions at all? Is there any input from members or the city?

K

Kaitlyn 04:26

Kind of and kind of not. Um, so the formation process for an ESD basically happens when a bunch of business owners, property owners come together and basically lobby City Council like, hey, we want to create this enhanced services district, and then they can collaborate with city council to do that. So there's really no specific way to do it. Typically, what will happen is those usually like an established Business Association in the area. So a good example is the most recent enhanced services district is a central Eastside that formed in 2019. There's an organization called the central Eastside industrial council. So they were a business association in the central Eastside. They came together with a proposal for an enhanced services district in the central Eastside. It was modeled off of clean and safe. I don't remember exactly what kind of outreach they did, but I think they did maybe like very minimal outreach to some property owners in the area to be like, hey, we want this. But it didn't require any kind of like vote from

property owners, which that's something that's actually kind of unique with Portland. And I guess Oregon, generally, is property owners do not get to vote on this, even though they're paying into it.

P Piper 05:58
Huh.

K Kaitlyn 05:59
The only decision makers in this process is city council. So for example, in California, it's required through state law that property owners have to vote as well as City Council really to gather input for it, it's really just going to city council and asking them for it. And if you have the means and resources, they will grant that to you.

P Piper 06:22
So someone's just going to city council, and being like, I want you to collect a fee from all the businesses in this area, because I think that there needs to be more there and city council can just say yes, and collect those fees. Is that what I'm yeah, am i understanding?

K Kaitlyn 06:39
pretty much. Of course, they'll also have to go through the process where they're going to have to like create a proposed contract for it a proposed scope of work. Sure. They have to identify like the geographic boundaries. But yeah, they can pretty much just ask City Council like, Hey, can I do this? And then if City Council's like, sure. Then the ESD is established?

P Piper 06:59
Just seems really weird. Like it's a it seems like it's a tax. And usually in Oregon, there's like pretty, there aren't they're pretty strict rules about how you can impose a tax like, it's actually pretty hard to have new taxes.

K Kaitlyn 07:13
Yeah, so this is how they get around it. It's not considered a tax. Like Legally speaking, there's literally been like legal challenges around this, it is not technically a tax. And the reason they argue that is because it's property owners imposing a fee on other property owners. So the city is not technically imposing that fee. But of course, it can be argued, like the city then collects it and has this agreement with these entities. So I consider it public money being used for private services. But you will hear that argument from ESDs that this is private money, it's not public money. And if you really want to get into it, like they also are getting public money through a few different ways. One way is city properties have to pay into it. So there's at least some

money going through that way, as well as the city also provides some general fund money for clean and safe. Specifically to support the downtown retail advocate position, right, which is basically like half paid for by the city half paid for by the ESD. So public money is definitely being funneled to them.

P Piper 08:30

Isn't that position, the one that Portland Business Alliance was caught lobbying with Sam Adams about having a higher salary for that person? Isn't that when that was happening?

K Kaitlyn 08:43

Yeah, yeah, there's so there was a really hilarious text message that was revealed from OPB where Jon Isaacs, who's the lobbyist for Portland Business Alliance, texted I don't remember for sure if it was Sam Adams or not, but it was someone in Wheeler's office or maybe even Wheeler directly. And he was like, why'd you short us 5k On the downtown retail advocate position. And then they ended up increasing the money to the \$25,000 that they had previously agreed upon, even though they were proposing \$20,000 Like officially through the city. Wow. Yeah. They're definitely trying to get as much money and resources from the city as I can.

P Piper 09:31

So I'm still confused. And maybe this is too much of a rabbit hole. But I'm, if a private like what authority does a private entity have for imposing a fee upon everyone in a geographic area? If if those individual businesses don't have to say yes to entering a contract with them? Like I just don't I actually just don't understand someone just walking up to all the businesses and being like, you owe me money now essentially, but like the city is backing it I guess like,

J Josh 10:02

it does seem like a little bit like they're shaking them down or, like, you know,

P Piper 10:07

yeah, it's just like, it's like, Who are you, you don't have control over this area. You're just an organization that is based here. It's just really bizarre. Maybe this is too much of a rabbit hole to get down to. But I don't understand how the authority to collect the fee even exists.

K Kaitlyn 10:25

Yeah, it's not too much of a rabbit hole. And obviously, there's still like legal questions around it like, yeah, how exactly is this legal. But basically, what they do is, once the ESD is formed, it's written into city code. They're basically creating city code around it. Every time these districts get established, however, that city code doesn't really direct what the BIDs can and cannot do.

It's really just there to be like, yes, these entities can exist. And they've used a variety of different mechanisms to become what we know is an enhanced services district today. Clean and Safe started out as an economic improvement district, which is kind of similar and how they formed that actually was years before they even formed clean and safe. There was a group called the Association for Portland Progress, which eventually became the managing organization of clean and safe. But they actually lobbied to have this ESD for years. And they first proposed it as an economic improvement district. And part of their lobbying was actually going to the Oregon State Legislature and creating a legal framework for economic improvement districts, which they then brought to Portland to create what is now clean and safe. But then eventually, I forgot exactly what happened in Oregon, but there was some kind of measure that was passed, that made it so that economic improvement district fees couldn't be mandatory. And so that's why they switched to this business improvement district model, or what is now called enhance services district is they saw BIDs in other cities, and they were like, Let's take that legal framework from other cities bring it here, they were able to convince City Council City Council voted on it. And in 1994, that's when clean and safe became a BID or an ESD, as we know it today. One of the main people you'll hear about in regards to Portland Business Alliance and clean and safe one of the big power players is Vanessa Sturgeon. Vanessa Sturgeon also has her hands in the opportunity's own stuff like it's it's all really intertwined. It's just like different means of getting funding essentially to do a lot of the same terrible things.

J

Josh 12:51

Well, these are just all like different apparatus to bring in large chunks of money. And the projects that the people we're talking about, are working on, from our perspective, they're all projects that hurt the city and hurt people, right. But they are things that can be obscured as they would help someone or help businesses or help help the city. So it's an interesting thing to think about. Because in past lives, I've always worked with like startup companies and advertising companies. So that kind of funding model where there's just like, rich people, somewhere that pay for things make sense to me. So this other thing where you're like, you're looking at federal money, or you're like shaking down neighborhood businesses, to fund private security is like a whole different thing.

K

Kaitlyn 13:34

So there's three ESDs, and Portland clean and safe, which is the oldest one managed by Portland Business Alliance. We also have the Lloyd District, which is managed by go Lloyd and then Central East side, which is the central Eastside industrial Council. And they all do slightly different things. But there are some major categories. And I think the biggest one, which is definitely the thing that like I focus on a lot, as well as others who are organizing against ESDs and BIDs, which is private security. So both the Central East Side and clean and safe hire their own private securit. Lloyd does not but Lloyd also does some other like public safety things, which I'll get into later. So after the city collects the fees and funnels it to the managing organizations for the ESDs they then contract with another company to do private security for them. So it's like contracts and contracts and contracts, which gets really confusing with this topic. In the case of clean and safe, clean and safe contracts with Portland patrol Inc to do private security. Portland patrol does both armed and unarmed private security. Portland patrol was also kind of created for clean and safe. That's where its roots as a security company came

out of. So that's portland patrol. And Portland patrol since then has also been really expanding since they started with clean and safe. So probably most notably, is for while they were contracting with tri met to do security. So there's overlap there as well. My understanding is that contract expired, and they didn't renew it. But I think there's also been some pushes by Portland patrol and tri met to create like a new contract. So that's something to keep on the radar. And part of the reason Trimet entered that agreement was by citing the great relationship they had with clean and safe. So that's who Portland patrol is. And then the Central East Side contracts with a security company called Northwest enforcement. The big difference between the central Eastside security is they have only unarmed guards. They also do not call their security, private security. They call them "safety ambassadors".

P Piper 16:17

Cute

K Kaitlyn 16:17

So the reason they actually do that is because when the central Eastside was forming, um, I was part of a coalition that was basically organizing against the formation of it. And of course, we were bringing up the issue of private security and how that increases harassment of unhoused people in the district. And we were basically telling them, like, you can't do that, like, don't do that. And their response was renaming their security to safety ambassadors, and then saying that they will also now receive trauma informed care training. That's it.

P Piper 16:55

And has that been the case?

K Kaitlyn 16:58

Um, yes, and no. So I guess the thing to note about them is, so they claim not to do sweeps, which is technically true, um, really, private security doesn't really have the authority to do like sweeps legally, however, they're still going to verbally tell people to move along. And they're going to harass people until they move, which to me, I still consider that like a form of basically enacting a sweep, you're just doing it through tactics of intimidation,

P Piper 17:33

it might not be totally clear what authority they have, right? So if you're, if you're not sure, you might comply, because you don't know, right?

J Josh 17:41

Right. If I'm sitting on the sidewalk, I'm not sure the person with the tucked in shirt yelling at

me, I don't know if they're, you know, an agent of the state or somebody else. But they're definitely yelling at me trying to get me out of here,

K

Kaitlyn 17:53

which that's another thing I was actually gonna bring up about the private security is, you'll notice that private security, often their uniforms look very, very similar to cop uniforms. And it's really difficult to tell the difference. You have to either really pay attention to where their badges are, and look at those minor differences. But that's also kind of I think, intentional on their part is like, if we look like cops that'll intimidate people more.

P

Piper 18:22

It's kind of wild to me sort of like as an aside thinking about, you know, we know that already Portland police spend half their time interacting with people that they classify as unhoused, at least. So it's like half of their time. And then, like, on top of that, there's additional private security, harassing unhoused folks in these enhanced service districts, it just seems like this is a very small population. How much money are we spending on just I don't know yelling at people?

K

Kaitlyn 18:58

Yeah, I've been really interested in doing some kind of cost analysis of like, both the police budget, but then also all of these private security contracts. I don't know exactly how you get ahold of all that information, but

P

Piper 19:13

it just seems excessive.

K

Kaitlyn 19:14

It's millions of dollars. That's all I know,

P

Piper 19:16

there was an audit of clean and safe, sort of before the contract renewal. Could you tell us anything about what the audit found?

K

Kaitlyn 19:25

Yeah, absolutely. Um, so the audit was actually of all of the enhanced services district's not just clean and safe, that audit was actually done because of the research we were doing in WRAP.

And in particular, like one of our members was like constantly going to the auditor's office, being like, what do you what kind of info did you have on these enhanced services districts and the auditor's office, well, at least like the people in the front desk were like, I don't even know what that is. I basically had to lead them through it. Meanwhile we were also doing public records request to get as many documents from the city around ESDs, because that's something we're also doing in other cities as well. And that was a big learning lesson, I think, for us, on public record law. So apparently, Oregon has some of the worst public records law in the entire country. So, compared to like other cities, some of the things we were able to get like, we weren't able to get any of that. And, of course, they gave us as much as they could. They were proposing like massive fees to just search for other things that they didn't even know if it actually existed. And so we barely got anything. And that definitely, as well as talking to the auditor's office got the attention of the auditor's office. And so they were like, Okay, we'll do an audit. And so they started the audit on enhanced services districts towards the beginning of 2020, and decided that their focus for the audit would specifically be on the city management of ESDs. So they didn't really focus specifically on like, the specific workings of the ESDs, but rather, how the city is collecting the money. What kind of follow up they might be doing, what kind of oversight essentially,

J Josh 21:28

so they like the accounting process, not like what the ES- like what they're actually doing.

K Kaitlyn 21:33

Yeah, so basically, kind of the argument for that, and it made sense. I would like to see a follow up audit later. But um, they focused on the city because they didn't know exactly how much they could audit of the actual workings of the ESDs. Because then you're starting to get into that weird private public territory. Yeah, so they stuck specifically with auditing what office of management and finance was doing, and as well as like, the mayor's office who oversees the office of management and finance. For those who don't know,

P Piper 22:09

before you get into the findings, it seems like there's just like a theme of like, they're existing in this limbo space where they're doing government things, but because they're not the government, you can't use government tools to hold them accountable. But because they're not a private thing. You can't use private tools to hold them accountable. Like it just seems kind of like they're in this like liminal space.

K Kaitlyn 22:29

Yeah. And yeah, it's funny. So like, we got all of the public records from the auditor's office that they collected through the whole auditing process. And that was something that turned up in the public records. Like for instance, there was an interview between the auditor who did the audit, whose name is Alexandra, who super awesome, was a huge ally to us in the auditor's office. And yeah, like, worked with us through the whole audit. But anyways, she interviewed

the head of Portland patrol, as part of her auditing review process. And the whole interview is basically the head just being like, I don't need to tell you anything. I'm, this is a private company, like, I can't hand you that information. And it was her kind of like arguing back like, well, this is an audit, like, we need that information. Yeah. And he was really, really defensive. So yeah, it does get really tricky. And that was something like even the auditor was having trouble finding information about these things, because they were like, we don't have to tell you, so that's definitely a thing.

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Piper 23:48

I don't like that.

J

Josh 23:49

Sketchy as fuck yeah.

P

Piper 23:51

So what did the audit find? So

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Kaitlyn 23:53

as far as the actual findings of the audit, the main thing they found was the city has done nearly no oversight of ESDs since they began, which would have been in the late 80s, early 90s. They are required through their contracts to collect things like incident reports, which are supposed to be sent to the mayor's office quarterly. That wasn't happening. There was a funny thing that happened though, with during the audit process where after they released the audit, they were like, yeah, the mayor's office didn't collect any of these things. And then they like, texted the auditor was like, No, we got these things, but they actually like only ever asked for those documents from clean and safe, like, once they were getting audited, and they were public records requests for it.

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Piper 24:44

Wow.

K

Kaitlyn 24:44

And so she was like, that's not substantial. Like that's not what your contract says to do. Like you're supposed to regularly be collecting these, which we also got a hold of those incident reports and their quarterly incident reports and each quarter only have maybe one to two complaints, some of them had zero. And we knew like, that's there's definitely been more complaints for this, but they didn't have any kind of process to collect those. So it seemed like they weren't getting any complaints. So that was another issue with that,

P

Piper 25:16

is there a way to complain about, like, interaction with an ESD? Like, is there any channel that like, say you or I could do if if someone was hassling us, and we thought they were doing something they weren't supposed to?

K

Kaitlyn 25:32

No, there's no formal way part of the audit is now they're starting to like form a way to do that. But yeah, as of right now, there's really no way to submit a complaint in like a formal way.

P

Piper 25:45

Wow. So less accountable than the Portland Police where you can submit a complaint. But it does go nowhere. But you can really hit submit.

J

Josh 25:54

That's, that's one of the things that's a little bit of a bummer. When when thinking and talking about private security and about these ESDs and BIDs. Is that like, we actually are finding that the private security is just like a worse version of the police somehow, it's just like, a like, like, just worse in all the ways. And so it's not even like, like, at least with the police. Like there's like a better future. But with private security, we're just like, can we get you as accountable as the Portland Police Bureau? Can we just move that far?

P

Piper 26:28

That's very depressing.

K

Kaitlyn 26:29

It is really depressing. And how I like to frame it is really like, if you're fighting public policing, you also have to be fighting private policing, like these entities work hand in hand together to ultimately police people, they serve the same function. It's just different means to do it. And especially as we're seeing, even if they're super minor cuts that make no difference, as we're seeing some like defunding of the police actually happening. Now, they're really leaning into that. And being like, well, we're getting rid of the police. So we need to supplement it with all this private security. So I definitely think those fights kind of have to go alongside each other.

J

Josh 27:14

Yeah, absolutely.

P

Piper 27:15

That makes a lot of sense. I would also imagine, like, the the positions are lower paid too. I'm guessing. Since they don't, they're probably not unionized are they unionized?

J

Josh 27:29

You mean the security folks,

P

Piper 27:31

the private security?

K

Kaitlyn 27:32

Yeah, I don't know how much they're making. I know they're not unionized though. Um, but yeah, they I would guess that they're probably making less than your, like, average Portland police officer, but

P

Piper 27:48

and in clean and safe. You mentioned that they also have a contract with the Portland Police. So like, what's going on, in clean and safe in particular, if they're doing both private and public police, but the public police are privately paid? And like also, do they interact with each other?

K

Kaitlyn 28:08

Yes, they work extremely close together. This is where I think it gets like really insidious, so their contract with the Portland Police Bureau is that ESD funds are used to pay the salaries of four Portland police officers. And as a result, those four officers are only allowed to patrol within the clean and safe district. And not only are they only patrolling in the clean and safe district, they also are being jointly supervised by the Central Precinct Sergeant as well as Portland patrol. So a private security company is managing four Portland police officers. For a while it was actually six police officers because Portland Police was like this is great and they threw in two extra people at no charge to work solely with the Clean and Safe district allegedly in this new contract renewal it's only supposed to be four I don't really believe that I'm assuming it's probably still six but allegedly it's only four now.

J

Josh 29:27

I wonder how that was working out now with a smaller Portland Police Bureau. I've heard numbers even around 700 sworn officers so to speak. You know this four those four officers are

going to be a larger and larger percentage of the available officer. So I wonder like, like how all these decisions work together. And then you think also about on the public side, the Portland Police Bureau and their union, you know, demanding more funding for more staffing, so that they can hire officers that again, they just don't seem to be able to hire. Like they just aren't currently, like successfully hiring anybody. So it's like, what what do you imagine is gonna happen here? Exactly. You're just gonna have the extra budget, just hang on to it and then ask for more and more and more. But that so far, it's worked for them.

K

Kaitlyn 30:17

One of the arguments we Wheeler made to keep the police contract during this recent contract renewal was basically saying that he didn't think that we had the public resources to continue paying for those positions. And so we needed the ESD funds to do so that was one of the arguments. And I guess, to give an update on like, what the status is of that contract. So that contract is another like separate contract. So the contract renewal that just happened was the agreement between the city and clean and safe, but clean and safe, then has an extra contract with Portland Police Bureau, which I think is supposed to expire next year. And so they said that they're going to take a look at it next year. If there's any actual action around that, that's to be seen. I don't really think there will be. But yeah, that's technically a whole other contract. And part of the contract is any entity can terminate the contract at any time with 30 day notice. Oh,

J

Josh 31:30

does that include podcasts?

K

Kaitlyn 31:33

It could.

P

Piper 31:33

I just wanted to check Wheeler for a second because I don't want to let like his lies float on by, but how was it? I'm saying it as a question, but it's not a question. It doesn't make any sense to say that the four officers can't be absorbed into the public budget when we currently have a bunch of funded positions, like I think 100 something funded positions that are unfilled in the Portland Police associ- or Portland Police Bureau. So like, you could just use the money for one of those to cover one of the four that you have hired. It just actually is nonsense. So anyway, I just didn't want to let that float by.

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Kaitlyn 32:08

Yeah, it definitely is.

P

Piner 32:10

Piper 32:50

We just had a contract renewal with clean and safe. And what I know is that Hardesty was proposing Jo Ann Hardesty was proposing limiting the renewal to one year and calling for a report. Primarily because of community concerns. And we heard a lot of testimony about community concerns. And that amendment was denied by the other, all the other councillors actually, voted against that amendment. And so now they have a five year contract. And then there was one other amendment though that did pass that Dan Ryan and Carmen Rubio worked on together, I don't really understand. That's, that's what I know. So what am I missing?

K

Kaitlyn 32:54

Yeah, I guess I'll give some context of what led up to that, because I think it's really important and understanding how this contract even got renewed the way it did. So part of the organizing I been doing around this is we formed a basically like coalition of sorts. It's not like a formal coalition, but basically the end clean and safe campaign. And that was a group of us who were really working to intervene in this contract process. Because historically, the contract renewal processes for clean and safe and enhanced services districts more generally, are not a super public process that people are really engaged in. And, obviously, there's a reason for that. They don't want a lot of people to get engaged in it. They want to just quietly pass it as quickly as I can. So we were like, we're definitely not going to let that happen. So we started out just like doing outreach to different city commissioners and just, you know, telling them the basic stuff about like, this is why ESDs are bad. And this is the concerns we have, especially with private security and the impact it has on unhoused community members. We talked to the office of management and finance, told them the same concerns. And our first like, demand of sorts, I guess was we just wanted the process to be opened up to the public as much as possible, since that's never really happened before, which they kind of did. They did a series of listening sessions over the summer. However, the way the listening sessions were structured was like complete bullshit. Basically, Portland Business Alliance was the one who was leading all of those listening sessions

J

Josh 35:01

Oh, well, you know, you gotta bring an impartial party right somebody that doesn't really doesn't really care either way they can like really be fair, judicious. You know, I got

P

Piper 35:12

someone with a financial stake. Yeah,

J

Josh 35:14

without a financial stake. I think that would be the key. And when I think of someone without a financial stake in Portland Portland Business Association is what I think of this is all facetious. I don't know, my sarcasm voice isn't very good. So

K

Kaitlyn 35:29

yes, so it was definitely not a good choice to organize a listening session. And not only was it organized by Portland Business Alliance, but then each of the listening sessions had different themes. So like the first one, it was only downtown retail businesses that could testify, and everyone else was not allowed to for that session. And then they did the same thing. There was like a rate payer session where it was only for ratepayers. There was a resident listening session that was only for residents, there was two public listening sessions that were like community wide listening sessions. One of them was actually in person, which was kind of fun. We had a like, small rally outside of where it was happening, and just like had some speakers and handed out propaganda. And then like, we all walked in together. And that city wide listening session. It everyone was in opposition, except for like, I think it was one person. Wow. Yeah.

P

Piper 36:41

Did it change it? Did it change anyone's mind?

K

Kaitlyn 36:44

No. Definitely not, within the office of management and finance and Portland Business Alliance, who basically drafted the whole contract. So that was that and even the resident, the residents listening session was also predominantly people speaking opposed, because there's a lot of residential property owners who are actually extremely opposed to ESDs. Mainly, because it's kind of a reason of like, I don't want to pay an extra fee. Which is understandable. And some of them also had concerns with private security as well. But that's definitely that was the interesting thing about this contract renewal process is we found like allies, and so many different places, because people hate these entities for like, such a broad array of reasons. So that actually worked in our favor, too, because there were people who were testifying against ESDs, who, like, we didn't know who weren't even really saying the same talking points as us who were coming at it from a different angle. And that really made it so the city couldn't just like write us off as some like fringe radical group, which I guess to some extent we are but

P

Piper 38:02

to some extent, they did.

K

Kaitlyn 38:04

Yeah.

P

Piper 38:05

But that's kinda cool, though. I mean, it does, it definitely seems like there's more people opposing it, even though it didn't result in a change at this time.

K

Kaitlyn 38:17

I've definitely seen like a shift and more people being aware of what these districts are and why they're bad, which has been cool to see.

P

Piper 38:26

Do you know what? Dan Ryan and Carmen Rubio's amendment was? That did pass?

K

Kaitlyn 38:32

Yes. So that was really sneaky. That was basically Dan Ryan. Um, it. Carmen Rubio didn't actually work on that amendment. Um, obviously, I wasn't in all the city hall meetings that happened between them and all the political maneuvering they did, but my guess as to what happened was Hardesty said she was gonna propose that amendment. Dan Ryan knew that Rubio was likely to go along with it whatever Hardesty he was doing. And so he created his own amendment, which basically does nothing. All it all it said was vaguely that they wanted to ensure that there would be a timeline for the review of the audit and the subsequent renegotiation of the contract. Should anything come out of the audit process that affects the contract.

P

Piper 39:36

So it's like it is like a can kicking way to get out of the boat?

K

Kaitlyn 39:40

I think so. So he basically like pitched it to Rubio's office is like this is a better approach. We'll still be able to make changes. And we heard a lot of rhetoric and like the actual city council meetings where they were saying that we need to pass this contract, because we've made some changes that we need right now. And we can't delay this for one more year, because we want to make at least some of these reforms, which my argument against that is, they can still make those changes, even without a five year contract renewal. Because a lot of what was like passed in the contract renewal was not actually things that were legally binding in their contract, but rather, it was part of their scope of work. And the scope of work, doesn't even have to necessarily be approved by city council, like they're supposed to send it to them. And obviously, part of the contract renewal was city council, affirming that the scope of work was good enough. But yeah, they could have still made those minor changes, and then only had a one year contract renewal. And then we could have did that. And that's basically what Hardesty was proposing.

P

Piper 39:50

And or were any of those changes meaningful in any way?

K Kaitlyn 41:05
No, not at all.

P Piper 41:08
Just checking you know, you never know. Yeah,

K Kaitlyn 41:11
I guess the big changes that they touted a lot was they did the same thing they did with the Central East Side where they rebranded their private security to no longer call them private security. And I forgot exactly the name. Yeah, I forgot exactly what the name they used for the clean and safe ones. It's, I think it's safety ambassadors, as well. But it's something like,

P Piper 41:39
That'll do it, they'll fix it.

K Kaitlyn 41:42
Yeah. And then they also made this stipulation that only 25% of the security officers can be armed during any time, like during the patrols. The thing about that, though, is we don't know how many of them are armed regularly right now, it could be that 25% is armed on any regular patrols.

P Piper 42:15
It also seems really hard to evaluate. So you'd have to like stop all of them.

K Kaitlyn 42:21
And part of the reason we don't know that is like, again, we've done all the public records requests, we can and we did get Portland Patrol's contract. And the only things redacted on it is the information about the salaries. And as well as the information about how the shifts work, which would then give all the information of how many armed patrol officers would be on at this certain time. So all that's redacted and not even public information. Their argument for redacting it is that it's trade secrets. Yeah, so when they say that, it's hard to be like, Oh, is this actually reduction? Because you won't even tell us how many there are right now. So that was really frustrating.

P

Piper 43:12

It could be an increase for all we know,

K

Kaitlyn 43:16

exactly. But that's what they did to the private security. So not really any big changes. And then the other thing they added that I think is just kind of like downright scary and harmful is now they're adding their own mental health team that will do mental health response. So this would be a mental health team that would essentially ultimately be managed by Portland Business Alliance, which makes me very uncomfortable.

J

Josh 43:48

You know, I was actually noticing some switching language on two of the local TV stations, they started saying street Response Teams instead of using the branded Portland's street response. So like when they were referring to Mingus Mapps', like funding for like PSR plus, you know, body cams plus staffing, they would specifically say, street response teams, like lowercase like, and I noticed it just because I'm like, Huh, that's weird that they're not because there would be a Portland apostrophe s street response, because it has a name, and it's like a thing that already exists. And so I'm now suddenly wondering if they're going to what they're going to do about that.

P

Piper 44:35

I think it is interesting because it also is related to Mingus Mapps made an argument in the city council meeting about like how as we were, we're waiting for Portland Street response to get up and running. We need this private street response that we're starting literally from scratch, right? That doesn't even exist yet. So it's he's somehow he's using like that, like a standard neoliberal argument, but that by now everyone kind of knows this bullshit that like, somehow it's just magically faster. And it's like just not believable at all, because we already have a model in Portland Street response. Like It'd be one thing if it didn't exist, but it does. It just needs to be expanded. Right? So how could it possibly be slower than the private one unless they're just literally not even making a plan?

J

Josh 45:27

Exactly. At first I first I thought they were just taking something away from Portland Street response and like trying to not give it kind of its flowers in the moment and not acknowledged how established it is at this point, because this is stuff from the last couple weeks. But now I'm starting to wonder if it was it's a more deliberate unbranding touch to to expand the idea of what a street response, quote unquote team is, into something that would also include private security, quote, unquote, mental health teams, lots of air quotes, and all that.

P

Piper 46:00

I don't love that.

K

Kaitlyn 46:01

I would agree that I think it's actually kind of intentional. Because there's also, these aren't formal written in policy yet. But there are talks of creating these like mental health teams for old town that are completely separate from Portland Street response. And it very much seems like an attempt to undermine Portland Street response. It also speaks to the broader trend of where, what direction we're going with services and mental health care. And this is actually where I even have like some critiques of like, Portland Street response and those kinds of models, is we're starting to move into a direction where services and psychiatric care are starting to be used as like another form of policing. We're seeing people given like the ultimatum of like, you can't be here, you're breaking the law. So it's either you go to a shelter, you go into treatment, or you go to jail. And that's something that's making me nervous with some of the rhetoric I've seen with Portland Street response is, there has been this talk of like, the problem with Portland Street response is we don't have a place to bring people. And it's like, that shouldn't be the goal. Because then it's playing a similar function to policing. This is definitely like another like, bigger topic, but it's definitely connected to, like ESDs and clean and safe and some of the rhetoric they're pushing, because ultimately, they're trying to just push people out of public space. And whether that's through throwing people into jail or throwing someone into a shelter, forced treatment, like they're gonna find a way

J

Josh 48:02

carceral systems are carceral. Yeah,

P

Piper 48:05

I'm glad you brought that up. Because, you know, we've been talking about sort of this, like rhetorical mashing together of some of these things that Mingus Maps has been doing. And that people for Portland, that dark money group has been doing, where they're, they're talking about Portland Street response, which is pretty popular in Portland, like people like the idea of it, and they're mashing it together with the idea of, you know, expanded police as well and the ESDs. And also things like shelter enforcement, which is kind of related to what you're referring to, which is, in my opinion, incarceration, if you're like requiring someone to be in a place. That seems like incarceration to me, and it's all kind of being lumped together as one thing. Versus like, for me, I really want to see these things separated, because I want alternatives to incarceration, I want community care, and it makes it so that I feel like people that might be my allies, you know, maybe like my liberal neighbor that just is nervous for people outside and wants someone to call to help, because they don't feel like they can handle it themselves. Like, those are people that I might be able to ally with, but instead they're in this coalition, like calling for more police. And it's scary. Yeah.

K

Kaitlyn 48:05

yeah, It's, yeah, it's becoming an increasing trend. And part of the reason that's happening,

like, especially regionally, it's happening nationally as well. But there is a Ninth Circuit Court case called Martin versus Boise which basically was a case in Boise, Idaho where some homeless people there were arrested for sleeping outside, and they sued the city and the Ninth Circuit the district courts were like, since it's Idaho, they were really conservative. And they were like, Oh, whatever. That's actually okay to do. And so they appealed it and took it to the ninth circuit. And that changes things, because now it's not just in Idaho, the rulings in the Ninth Circuit will affect all of the states, which are in the Ninth Circuit, which includes Oregon and includes Washington and California. And the Ninth Circuit ruled that yeah, that's unconstitutional to punish people for sleeping outside when they have no other means of shelter. And that's where it gets really tricky. Is that part where they say they have no other means of shelter? And so cities hear that and then they're like, Oh, okay. So if we just create enough shelter options, to just push people into them, then legally we can be justified to to ticket people for sleeping outside to sweet people. And so that's why you're kind of seeing this increase in these like sanctioned encampments. Because if we just forced people there, so in that ordinance passed, actually, we were like, super critical of the creation of these like sanctioned encampments, especially because that ordinance when they passed it, it was also like an ordinance to like, change the protocol for doing sweeps. Because when the pandemic started, they made it way higher, they made way higher of a threshold for people to be like posted for a sweep. So it was a very insidious ordinance. When it happened, it went kind of under the radar. But that was tied into this proposal for the six sanctioned, encampments. And that kind of seems the direction that the city is going, as well as a lot of like neighborhood, like vigilante groups as well are kind of like pushing for that, too.

P

Piper 52:01

We've been talking a lot about rhetoric, and sort of the messaging around some of this stuff. And I think it's notable, and I would love to hear your thoughts about sort of the fact that these organizations also provide cleaning services, and how that has been sort of also lumped in with the idea of like, litter, but also treating people as litter. Um, and so I'd love to hear like what you think about, just like the cleaning aspect of clean and safe?

K

Kaitlyn 52:32

Oh, yeah. I don't like it. When we were like, doing the campaign against clean and safe, we didn't focus on the cleaning portion, mainly because like, they would just write us off as being like, how can you be against people picking up trash, and it gets very nuanced into, like, why this is actually a pretty terrible system. But my thoughts on it are, it's a very terrible system, and for many reasons. Um, so one of the things that WRAP did was they worked with UC Berkeley, on a report of business improvement districts in California. And one of the findings from that report was that bits often use social services as a means to push people out of public space. And it's a very exploitative feature of business improvement districts. And all the things that were found in that report, the UC Berkeley report are all relevant to how Portland ESDs operate as well. So by creating this, like cleaning program, the whole point of it is it's through Central City concern through a program called Clean start, and people go through this program. And then they work to pick up trash. Some of the ways that it's really flawed is the fact that it's considered a program. It's not really a job, like people are getting paid, but you're only going to be in this program for a few months. And sometimes they might have opportunities to like get higher positions within there, but it's not like your typical employment. And as a result, there's no union, there's no workers protections. There's no guarantee that people are going to get

paid a living wage. And it's been highly exploitative in the past because of that. And the real intention of this cleaning through this program is to basically cut on cost for sanitation in the cities. Because something important to know about business improvement districts is What probably their main function is they exist to push homeless people out of public space. But it's also a direct result of neoliberalism, especially the privatization aspect of neoliberalism that became very big in the 80s, where all of these public space services were being replaced with privatized services. And we saw that with sanitation. And so now sanitation is happening through this weird nonprofit cleaning program. Where there's no union workers. This is a little old, but in one of the public records, we did get a former city commissioner actually wrote out a letter justifying why they paid the cleaners and clean and safe below a living wage. And they said, it's because it's a job training program, and people have the opportunity to move up.

P

Piper 56:04

Gross

K

Kaitlyn 56:05

By framing it is like this, like job training program. And we're helping people like it creates this great image,

P

Piper 56:12

but a job you eliminated.

K

Kaitlyn 56:14

Yeah, it's also like, getting rid of like, union protected jobs. And so it's, it's a whole mess, um, at the end of the day, like, I'm not gonna judge individuals who like enter the program, because people are not given a lot of options. And, they're not really that harmful, like, as far as like actual harm against people like they don't do any sweeps or anything, they're really just picking up trash for the most part. But sometimes you'll hear because Clean Start not only works with Clean and Safe, but they also work with the Central East side as well. And clean start also works with HUCIRP, which is the homelessness and urban camping impact reduction program. That's an entity that does sweeps in Portland, it's a very convoluted name. But they contract with HUCIRP as well. And clean starts roll during sweeps is basically that when a site hits the certain threshold where it needs to be cleaned or swept, clean start will go there and like maybe pick up some trash offer resources. And so sometimes you'll hear the term like "snitch teams" is kind of the role that they're playing. So they do like an evaluation of the camps and bring it back to HUCIRP, and are like, here's where it's at on the threshold. So that's another like problem with it is it's really like pitting people against each other to like poor people against each other, which I also think is very uncomfortable and unsettling. But yeah, those are, that's really the gist of kind of the issue between these of these, like cleaning programs really. Yeah, and I guess on that note, too, though, like, there is people looking for alternatives. We work with a really awesome person named Barbie who founded Ground Score, which Ground Score is a peer led Association. And they pick up trash at camps. And it's all like

consensual, they build strong relationships, people are paid a living wage, it's not some job training program that people get kicked out of. So there definitely is alternatives to clean start. But, yeah, that's kind of what they are and what they do.

P Piper 58:59

Is there anything you want people to know about yesterday that we had that we haven't asked you about?

K Kaitlyn 59:04

Another form of policing and getting involved with the carceral state that ESDs do is they work with the district attorney's office. There is a long history of it, and some of it is worse than others. But basically, there is a unit within the District Attorney's Office, which is called the strategic prosecution and Services Unit. It was formerly the

P Piper 59:32

these names!

K Kaitlyn 59:34

Yeah, which that was a rebrand to the name before that was it was the Oh my God, why am I blanking on the name but Oh, neighborhood District Attorney program

P Piper 59:47

that sounded friendlier. Why did they re-brand?

K Kaitlyn 59:49

Yeah, that's what I thought when they did the Rename. I was like, that sounds worse but okay. But what that division does is they're the ones to facilitate the community courts. Community courts also came about I would say, as a result of neoliberalism started to come about, especially in the 80s, and 90s. Portland actually, is one of the cities that, I guess kind of created almost the model for community courts. I don't think they had the first community courts, but I know that they were often looked to as a model. But basically, it's an alternative sentencing program. So instead of like getting charged, and going through, like the traditional court system, for like minor offenses, people will then be routed through the community courts. And how that involves ESDs and BIDs. Because BIDs and other cities also have relationships with their local community courts, is in Portland, at least they contract with these community courts. And that looks a variety of different ways. But in Portland, how it looked with clean and safe. Which this has since changed, because the community courts in Portland, actually aren't operational right now, ever since the pandemic started. So things are different now. But I would

say at its worst, clean and safe was: one, providing money to the district attorney's office. Ever since their inception, they have paid the salary for a staffer in the district attorney's office. She works in the strategic prosecution Services Unit. They still pay her salary today. So what they say and I still have not been able to get like clarification that makes sense to me. But they say she's technically a Portland Business Alliance employee who just works in the district attorney's office. And we did confirm with a staffer in the district attorney's office, and she's not on their payroll, but she still works in the office. She does just like administrative work. So she's not like prosecuting any one. But still being in that office, you're going to have access to information. And your boss is Portland Business Alliance. It's not the district attorney.

P

Piper 1:02:28

That's just real, real sketchy.

K

Kaitlyn 1:02:30

Yeah. And they say that, like she doesn't do anything, except for just help out in the district attorney's office. But like, I don't know how much to trust that. And

P

Piper 1:02:40

Then why do they pay for it? Yeah, it just doesn't pass the smell test.

K

Kaitlyn 1:02:45

So that's something that they've done for a long time and still do something that they used to do that. Thankfully, they don't do anymore. Who's to say they won't try to bring it back. But part of their contract with the community courts in Portland, was if people go through the community courts, you get sentenced to community service, usually. And so for a while they had an agreement where the community service people had to do after they went through the community courts was to work as a cleaner for clean and safe. And people were not paid for this.

P

Piper 1:03:27

Oh, my I have to stop here for a second. So we've got money being taken from just like people that have businesses in the area. That money is used to hire private police essentially, but who worked directly with the actual police. And some of the money is used to pay actual police who have the authority to arrest people. And then they pay for a person, the DA 's office. So the police being paid by the Portland Business Association can arrest a person, they can be sent to this community court. They can be sentenced to work for the organization that paid the police who arrested them.

K

Kaitlyn 1:04:10

K Kaitlyn 1:04:10

Yes, that's exactly it. It and luckily, they don't do that anymore. Probably because there was definitely scrutiny around that. But they did collect some statistics around that program. Portland Business alliance did and used to tout it on their website hilariously like it was a good thing.

P Piper 1:04:34

Oh, my God,

K Kaitlyn 1:04:34

And one of the statistics is they saved almost a million dollars worth of wage cost. By partnering with the community courts,

J Josh 1:04:46

yes. That's not called saving.

K Kaitlyn 1:04:49

Yeah, so that's a million dollars that should have gone to workers and

P Piper 1:04:54

yeah, and since we know a lot of a lot of the arrests have Half of the arrests that that the Portland Police Bureau makes our unhoused folks are people they categorize as unhoused. And you could just be taking people that currently can't afford a house and then forcing them to work for free.

K Kaitlyn 1:05:15

Yeah. Um, so it was absolutely a means for them to get free labor like, yeah, there's no, there's no sugarcoating it really?

P Piper 1:05:25

That is dark.

J Josh 1:05:26

Yeah, I think with the with the like touting it on their website, it also doesn't make it a thing

where it's like, oh, you know, it wasn't that much. It didn't, you know, it was just a few people, you know, it's not a big deal. Like for them saying no, no, it saved us a million dollars. This is great. Yeah. Monsters.

K

Kaitlyn 1:05:45

So yeah. And something I like to bring up in reference to that, too, is there was a case in St. Louis, where their downtown business improvement district had a similar relationship with the community courts, like people were sentenced to do community service for this BID. A small difference. And probably even worse, though, was the BID money was also funding a judge. Yeah, so there was a lawsuit against that, because homeless people were being sentenced through these community courts and forced to do community service. And they actually ruled that those courts are unconstitutional in St. Louis. And in Missouri, really, because they cited a few things. One of them was that it completely takes away people's right to a trial, people are kind of like, given this option of like, Oh, you, you don't have to be sentenced normally and aren't fully informed of what the rights are, and kind of get almost coerced into these programs instead of actually just like, fighting it in court if they want to. So that was an issue. And then the other thing was also the funding of a judge by a business improvement district. They were like, Yeah, that's not cool.

P

Piper 1:07:14

That's what that's one step too far. You got to dial it back one level

J

Josh 1:07:18

I'm imagining record judge with robes that had like, like NASCAR style badges from the local businesses that funded them. And then like, when the judge is sentencing you to your, you know, your well, your work without pay, then you could know what businesses they represent a little more directly. Yeah, just an idea. Kaitlyn, one of the things we've been talking about a lot lately is how how hopeless everything is, and how nothing seems to work. And I thank you for sharing more of that with us.

P

Piper 1:08:01

I do have to say I am surprised at how many new horrible things I've learned because I already really hated this a lot. And

K

Kaitlyn 1:08:11

It gets worse the more you learn

J

Josh 1:08:14

one thing I will say is that something we I feel like we've learned in this journey of talking about various things going on at city together is that it's definitely become clear that the more we talk to each other, the more we do things like testify in front of city council, the more people hear the good word of, of, of kind of, well, the oppression that's going on, under our authority, right? The state is using our authority, our money or whatever, our public resources to do these terrible things. And so do you see any like hope or any future for any of this stuff? Or are you just gonna bang against the wall until it falls down?

K

Kaitlyn 1:08:54

I'm probably definitely banging against a wall until it falls down. I mean, yeah, I I've been, I agree with you all, I've been very cynical about things lately, have been like, this is all hopeless. And I guess something that's kind of keeping me somewhat optimistic. And what I've been trying to kind of shift the conversation to a little bit more is so we just saw how ESDs work in Portland through that clean and safe contract renewal. And I think that opened up to people like oh, wow, this is bullshit. But like, that was so par for the course for business improvement districts in cities across the country. And I guess this is like, making it like more Doomsday, but like, this is definitely existing and expanding across the country. But with that said, and I think this is where I've become like more optimistic is we're also not alone in our fights against these entities. In other cities, they're starting to, like a lot of community members are starting to catch on to like, this is what these districts are, this is what they're doing. This isn't right. A few examples is in Los Angeles, for example, which something to note, as well is Portland only has three ESDs. Los Angeles, for example, I think has it's like 40 or 50 BIDs. And in New York City, it's closer to like, I think, like 80, 60 or 80, around that range.

P

Piper 1:10:42

Oh my god.

K

Kaitlyn 1:10:44

Yeah, somewhat of a differences, the bits and other cities, sometimes they'll only be like 15 blocks or something like that, but then they'll all be clustered together. Whereas Portland's are definitely like way geographically bigger. But with that said, it's a little easier, you could argue to only focus on three ESDs. And their managing organizations versus like 40 of them,

P

Piper 1:11:12

is at least easier to figure out what's going on, which is already quite a burden.

K

Kaitlyn 1:11:18

Exactly. Um, but in Los Angeles, there's been a lot of really great organizing against BIDs there, because they are very intensely violent, especially towards poor and homeless people. And they've made some gains. Um, it's also kind of sad, because you'll then see the power of BIDs.

But as they've been fighting against them, for instance, last year was the Chinatown BID renewal in Los Angeles. And organizers there did outreach to all the property owners in the district. And when it came to the property vote, they actually got more property owners to vote no, on the bid renewal than vote yes. Um, the reason it passed, however, and then this is just another reason to be like BIDs are fucked up. But the votes are weighted on property value. And so the combined property value of the people who voted yes to renew the BID was higher than the combined property value of those, or else. And part of the reason that was is because the city of Los Angeles owns property, and gets to vote. And so of course, there's is like high value property, they vote yes, and it helps tip the bid in their favor. But that's really great to see. There's also folks in Washington, DC, who had been fighting BIDs there, because they're also very intensifying. Recently, a business improvement district started managing a public park in Washington, DC. And then another revelation that came out a couple days ago is not only is that happening, but then the BID entered a partnership with Amazon to sponsor the park.

P

Piper 1:13:13

Oh, god

K

Kaitlyn 1:13:14

Before this transition happened, like there's a bunch of unhoused people living in this park. And they swept everybody did the renovations, and now there's like a bunch of like hostile architecture, it's heavily policed, and people aren't sleeping there anymore. So communities were literally destroyed. But there's a lot of great people there who are also fighting against that. Same within San Francisco, there's people fighting in New York City all over

P

Piper 1:13:44

that is very, very hopeful, because it does seem like the resistance to it is just getting started. So maybe like, there could be a lot of momentum. But I do wonder, like, you know, when you look at how this how these contracts are renewed, kind of who has power in these systems, like what are like the lever points that people can put pressure on, so we had, like, you know, the community feedback, but obviously, they just didn't, you know, in Portland, they just ignored it, essentially. So like, what can we do to like, Who can we put pressure on?

J

Josh 1:14:22

Maybe to set you up Kaitlyn, that one of the things that we kept keep coming back to on the podcast is that in Portland, you know, while legislatively and through city council and through testimony city council and trying to move politicians, we hasn't been very successful, we've actually been incredibly successful just yelling at cops. And that, I mean, it kind of makes it small, right? But like the actual just providing an environment that's really not like, happy for Portland Police Bureau has actually run off police. They have left because of this. And so in our minds, it's like, okay, so while we couldn't necessarily get city council to do anything useful for us, we can yell at cops more. And so that's that's like some place we could put energy that

could do positive things to the city. So if you, you know, whether that's official channels or non official channels or other ideas, any any place where you've seen like actual movement or progress would be really interesting.

K

Kaitlyn 1:15:21

I think one of the next steps, that's an obvious next step is the audit review process still has to happen. So that is a place where I think there can still be pressure put. Something I'm a little concerned about, but also the audit process has just begun. So there's definitely still room to change it. But it kind of seems like the audit review process is happening through office of management and finance. Which is a little alarming to me. But again, they're really in the preliminary stages of it, so it could change. But the reason I bring up the audit process is something you can interpret from the audit recommendations. is part of the recommendations was city council needs to do a review of ESDs and determine what their functions are. And I don't have it right in front of me. But the way it was phrased, left room for interpretation, that city council as part of this process can decide if we even need to have ESDs. And I think that's still something that is on the table and something that can be discussed, like do we actually need these districts. Because that's my take at the end of the day, like I want these districts abolished, like they should not exist for so many reasons. So that will be something and part of this process, too, is whatever they end up deciding from this process. It's supposed to be written into city code. And so, for example, they could write into city code under the code about ESDs, that ESDs are not allowed to contract for private security. There's no rule saying they can't write that into city code. And so putting pressure to try to write these things into city code, like ESDs, can't hire police or private security could be a potential next step for placing pressure. Yeah, I and like, I know, it sounds really basic, but I think it's very, very necessary for this topic is like, we still need so much public education around it. Because part of ESDs and BIDs is they're very, very intentionally confusing, because they don't want people to look into what is actually happening. And I still think that there's a lot that needs to be done to kind of illuminate these. And it's definitely a challenge, especially because like, it's really hard to quickly explain what these districts are to people. It really warrants like hours and hours of conversation to start to like really understand them. I guess another pressure point, in my opinion is ultimately part of my goal is not just to get rid of ESDs it's really to take down Portland Business Alliance.

P

Piper 1:18:49

Hell yeah.

J

Josh 1:18:49

Talk about it, what's up? Yeah,

K

Kaitlyn 1:18:51

and I think that's really like a general shift that I would like to see is more attention placed on Portland Business Alliance and some of the like larger property owners who are really having a lot of sway in city council. And the reason that's so integral to ESDs is because of how Portland

lot of sway in city council. And the reason that's so integral to ESDs is because of how Portland Business Alliance even exist. Something not everyone knows about Portland Business Alliance is it serves two purposes. It's the Regional Chamber of Commerce. It's also the managing organization for clean and safe. And the reason that relationship exist is it's tied up in the creation of Portland Business Alliance. Portland Business Alliance started as a merger between the Association for Portland progress which was the former managing organization of clean and safe and the Regional Chamber of Commerce, which was just called the Portland Chamber of Commerce at the time, and this happened in 2000. So it was negotiated by the head of association for Portland progress, who then became like the person who created Portland Business Alliance. His name is Kim Kimbrough. And part of like what he brought when pushing for this merger was he wanted to see a shift in more lobbying through ESDs. And using ESD money to do lobbying. And so by creating this merger, they were able to start doing a lot more lobbying that they weren't doing before. Really, the bottom line is Portland Business Alliance's existence is dependent on clean and safe and the ESD. Like, that's how it was formed. So when you hear about all the terrible things Portland Business Alliance is doing, and you're like, how are they able to have this power? It all stems back to that merger in 2000. That created Portland Business Alliance as we know it today.

P

Piper 1:21:03

A lot of their funding comes from that too, right?

K

Kaitlyn 1:21:05

Yeah. So that's basically how they're funding like half of their staff salaries is through this merger because there's not really a difference between Portland Business Alliance staff and clean and safe staff there isn't really a big difference at all. So it's all tied up together. And yeah, I think like necessarily to really take down Portland Business Alliance who's influencing elections, you kind of have to get rid of the ESD. But then that becomes tricky because they're influencing elections and city hall and they're able to keep this contract because they're getting the right people in office and they're donating a lot of money. And also, sometimes I don't even think it's that people support Portland Business Alliance on city council, but there's also city commissioners who are just straight up afraid of Portland Business Alliance and want to stay neutral because if they come out against Portland Business Alliance, it could cost you an election, it's a very vicious cycle and I think needs to really be interrupted.