

Sisters Voice

Winter 2022

SISTERS OF THE ROAD CAFE 133

STOP the WAR AGAINST the POOR



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SISTERS OF THE ROAD
HERE THERE ARE NO STRANGERS, FRIENDS WE NEVER MET!

WE OPPOSE RACISM &



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Sisters of the Road exists to build authentic relationships and alleviate the hunger of isolation in an atmosphere of nonviolence and gentlepersonalism that nurtures the whole individual, while seeking systemic solutions that reach the roots of homelessness and poverty to end them forever



From the ED's Desk

Recommiting to our values with a new home

By Kat Mahoney, Acting Executive Director

When our founders first launched Sisters of the Road 43 years ago, they dreamed of a future where the houseless community lived with nourishment, dignity, and self-determination. They also believed in rooting out systemic causes of poverty and food insecurity in order to end them forever. Today, our commitment to these values remain steadfast and unwavering.

As Acting Executive Director, I'm determined to rebuild our organization so that we can better serve our community, but we can't do this alone. I invite you to help us realize our goal of purchasing a new building to house our permanent cafe and revitalizing the long-term health of our organization.

In August, shortly after our former executive director stepped down, the Board of Directors appointed me acting executive director. I had been serving as the board secretary at the time, and my colleagues felt that I could help transition our organization, due to my experience in the business sector and project management.

Most people in Portland know me as an attorney dedicated to advancing social justice. I first became involved with Sisters of the Road two years ago, working with Stop the Sweeps and researching legal avenues to interrupt the displacement of our houseless community. Learning more about the organization through this process, I wanted to continue to stick around and help. I learned even though the systemic change program was actively working on several projects, internal infrastruc-

ture problems existed. I joined the board hoping to lend guidance, advice, and support to the organization as a whole

As many of you know, Sisters of the Road has struggled to keep our cafe open since the start of the pandemic in 2020. Even as we continued to stay active with our advocacy work, our community sorely felt the absence of a reliable dining and community space with caring staff. But while our team scrambled to reopen the cafe, our internal systems and work culture were failing. The pandemic and the racial reckoning of 2020 both had revealed deeply ingrained issues and created new challenges in our organization. By the summer of this year, we found ourselves with a cafe overridden with mold and asbestos with no avenues for restoration, our leadership destabilized, and a staff shortage. We had hit rock bottom.

After a period of deep reflection, Sisters of the Road concluded that in order to serve the houseless community and advocate for systemic solutions for the long-term, we needed to rebuild. No one should be expected to eat among leaky pipes, mold in the walls, and suspected asbestos in the chipping paint, regardless of their financial status. That is why our plans include purchasing a building within the Old Town neighborhood to serve as the permanent cafe, with updated amenities and a dignified, hygienic environment.

We will also establish new infrastructure and policies to foster a healthy and equitable work culture. While we focus on this work, we will be reducing staff and keeping the cafe closed but will continue our systemic change program. Currently, we're working with PSU to continue crafting a community engagement plan to align

our services with the needs of impacted individuals.

We are also continuing our partnership with WRAP (Western Regional Advocacy Project) and will be working on several campaigns, such as the Human Bill of Rights and the Right to Rest Act, that seek to decriminalize houseless people and change the narrative that oftentimes demonizes the most vulnerable population of our city.

We know this will be a painful process at times, but we believe a future where we are living our values and treating both our guests and staff with fairness and dignity will be worth it.

Our revitalized cafe will be not only be a dining space but also an organizing space. In the past, meetings such as hygiene huddles helped shape the organization Hygiene 4 All. Sisters of the Road also held space in the cafe for people to meet and work towards forming groups such as Groundscore Association, Poor People's Campaign, and Stop the Sweeps. Sisters of the Road always hoped for the space to be more than a cafe. And it will be again. It will be a place to exchange resources, pick up supplies, build community, and organize.

The new space will allow us to not only feed more people, it will allow us to contribute to our community in a deeper way. We're excited about our future and we hope that you'll join us.

As we enter the end-of-the-year giving season, we hope you'll consider donating or increasing your regular donation. Each dollar will go toward our future permanent home and cafe — and our long-term sustainability. You can also help by sharing our news with your community and let them know how they can get involved.

Thank you for your continued support and trust.

“I invite you to help us realize our goal of purchasing a new building to house our permanent cafe”

IS DOWNTOWN REALLY SAFE AND CLEAN? FOR WHO?

Over twenty years, Portland Business Alliance has positioned themselves as the largest and most powerful lobbying entity in the city. Systemic change investigates the history and current activities of Portland's ESDs.

By Lauren Armony and Kaitlyn Dey

Sisters of the Road is in the heart of the Downtown Clean & Safe Enhanced Services District (ESD), one of the largest and oldest Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the country, spanning 213 blocks of Downtown Portland. BIDs/ESDs are an important facet of the overarching strategy business interests are employing to increase their control over public space and policy.



Image Credit: WRAP (above)
End ESD's (next page)

What are BIDs/ESDs?

BIDs/ESDs are geographically-bound districts that force property owners to pay a 'property management license fee' collected by the City. These fees are then funneled to a private entity, typically a business association, responsible for managing the BID/ESD.

The enhanced services Portland ESDs fund include, but are not limited to: private security with authority to patrol public sidewalks, four police officers specifically assigned to patrol within ESD boundaries (in addition to the officers already assigned from Central Precinct), street cleaning, holiday lighting, grants for events, lobbying activities, and, unique to Portland, a budget line for experienced Falconers to manage hawks trained to displace crows in the downtown area. These services are intended to exclusively support businesses in the district, with little regard to the residents, renters, and employees in the area.

The Business Behind Clean & Safe

Downtown Clean & Safe was established as Portland's first BID in 1994, after a successful pilot program launched in 1988. In 2002, the Portland Chamber of Commerce merged with Downtown Clean & Safe, creating what we know as Portland Business Alliance today. This merger was intentionally designed to leverage ESD fees

towards lobbying efforts well beyond the scope of downtown. Registered as a 501(c)(6) corporation, their intentions are actualized as Portland Business Alliance is emboldened to engage in an unlimited amount of lobbying all while managing operations of the ESD.

Over the course of twenty years, Portland Business Alliance has positioned themselves as the largest and most powerful lobbying entity in the city. Often influencing elections and shaping City policy regarding some of the City’s most pressing issues, especially around homelessness.

Enhanced Services Districts = Homeless Exclusion Districts

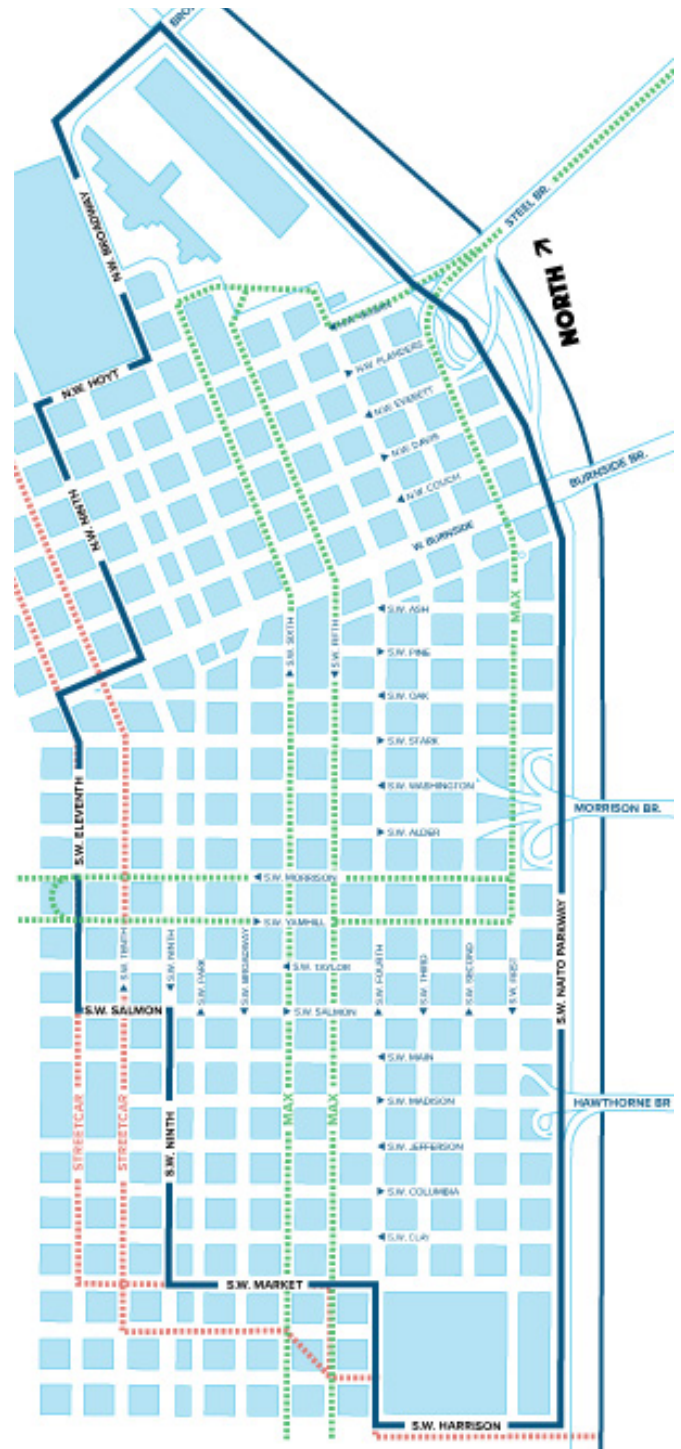
It is a regular occurrence for us at Sisters to hear community members share their experience of being harassed by law enforcement. In partnership with Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), we started investigating the history and current activities of Portland’s ESDs. This involved digging through the City Archives, submitting public records requests, and doing our own background research.

Obtaining public records was a major uphill battle. Our initial record request was estimated to cost thousands of dollars, and the City asked us to narrow our request. After several rounds of reducing our search criteria, the City ultimately denied and closed our request. With help from the State of Oregon’s public records advocate, we appealed to the District Attorney’s Office and were denied.

We ultimately speculated the records requested were never retained by the City, despite being required per their contract, revealing major transparency and oversight concerns. This caught the attention of the City Auditor’s Office who promptly decided to do an audit.

Portland City Auditor’s Office concludes “City provides little oversight of privately funded public services”

Until 2020, Portland’s ESDs had never been subject to a performance audit by the City of Portland despite the fact the ESDs receive



The Clean & Safe ESD covers 213 blocks primarily in downtown Portland and the Pearl District.

ESDs use public resources to privatize functions of local government with no community oversight.

“A crime such as public consumption of alcohol that may be ignored in another part of town may result in different consequences in a district with security officers and extra police officers or the district’s access to the district attorney and community courts.”

millions of dollars annually, collected by the City of Portland, and have been in existence for over three decades. Findings of the audit revealed an alarming lack of transparency in how ESDs operate, including almost zero oversight by the City, creating a large potential for disparate outcomes.

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Recommendations put forth in the audit are compulsory for the City to satisfy. In August 2021 the City hired an ESD Program Coordinator tasked with fulfilling these requirements and leading an audit review process. In May 2022

the initial phase of the audit response launched with a survey and online listening sessions. During these sessions, members of the public overwhelmingly agreed there needed to be more transparency and opportunity for ratepayers to opt out of paying the ESD fee.

By September 2022, recommendations for changes to ESD City Code were to be drafted and ultimately voted on by City Council. However, in early August 2022, the audit review process stalled when Shawn Campbell, the ESD Program Coordinator, was abruptly no longer employed by the Office of Management and Finance with no indication as to why. So far, no inquiries have elicited any concrete plans to continue the audit response process even as the final September 2023 deadline draws near.

Going Forward

This audit response is important not only for accountability, but to restore trust in public offices.

We are strongly advocating for the City to provide Portland residents with a timely plan for how they intend to resume this process. We are entitled to the dignity and respect in transparency of, and participation in, public processes and spaces.

Here are ways you can learn more and share your thoughts:

Sign up for the ESD Audit Response Newsletter
<https://signup.e2ma.net/signup/1961307/1887537/>

Provide public comment directly to City of Portland’s Office of Management and Finance
<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/omf/81584>

Learn more about ESD’s and BID’s
WRAP: <https://wraphome.org/homeless-exclusion-districts/>
Website: <https://www.endcleanandsafe.org>

Root and Rise Up

Over the years, we've used food as a way of not only nurturing individuals' bodies but also to create space for conversation and the building of community—a community that has always helped direct the work of our organization. While our cafe is currently closed, we are regrounding ourselves in our roots and history in order to return stronger than ever. Consider donating to our End of Year Campaign- your donation will help support us in writing this next chapter for Sisters.

Ways to Give

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

Does your employer match donations to 501(c)(3) non-profits? Many do, including employers like Intel, Nike, and even Starbucks. Contact your HR department and/or email us to see if you can double your donation and your impact!

STOCK DONATIONS

Sisters of the Road accepts stock donations through Morgan Stanley. If you're thinking about downsizing your portfolio this winter, then reach out to us to find out how to send some stocks our way to support our work.

CONTACT US

Need help giving? Reach out anytime:
development@sistersoftheroad.org
503-222-5694 x114

FACEBOOK FUNDRAISERS

Did you know that you can host your own fundraiser for Sisters of the Road on Facebook? People often do these for their birthdays in lieu of gifts, but why not consider it for Christmas as well? For more information, reach out to us.

PLANNED GIVING

We hope you're going to be around for many years to come, but if you're thinking about your lasting legacy, consider adding Sisters of the Road as a beneficiary of your estate.

QR CODE



GIVE!GUIDE

Sisters of the Road is, once again, in Willamette Week's Give!Guide. If you're supporting a lot of local organizations (which you totally should!), then the Give!Guide is an easy way to do it, plus you'll be entered to win cool prizes!
<https://giveguide.org>

AN ATMOSPHERE OF INCLUSION



On the creation of Sisters' Personalist Center and building with community

**By Justice Hager
Development Manager**

Back in 2006, almost everything Sisters of the Road did happened in one place: our cozy cafe. The Cafe staff didn't just prepare and serve meals there. They managed barter workers, dealt with interpersonal conflicts, processed and distributed mail, and handed out hygiene supplies to community members. One person, the cafe floor manager, was responsible for keeping all of that work going simultaneously!

As former Associate Director Kate Cox put it when I talked to her recently about her memories of the time, "When I think back to what we were trying to do right out of the cafe, it was wild."

The staff began to imagine expanding into the adjacent space that was, at the time, primarily being used by Sisters for storage. The vision of utilizing this space "was about actively including customers in providing services like mail, phones, computers, and hygiene supplies, [in addition to] creating a more welcoming, more dignified space for those services," explained Kate. Out of this vision, Sisters' Personalist Center was born.

While I was speaking with Kate, I could clearly see the parallels between the situation that staff faced over 15 years ago and the situation today. Since the pandemic began, we tried to continue serving food to people who need it, but some of the same problems arose. The lack of barter workers to support our limited cafe staff in providing meal service meant that, again, our staff were managing too much and our community were not meaningfully being included in our work. We have been struggling with the same "convergence between operational challenges and [trying to] fulfill our philosophies" that Kate described during her time at Sisters.

Meanwhile the need in Portland has continued to grow and grow. In 2009 the city, in conjunction with Portland State Univer-

2009 After the city passed a Sit/Lie ordinance, Sisters of the Road organized a letter-writing campaign against the ordinance and created drop-in hours for people who received tickets from it and other "quality of life" crimes with folks providing representation for them. An effort was also being made to track these citations and understand the patterns of enforcement and to help build potential future cases against unconstitutional enforcement of these types of ordinances and laws.

2011 Sisters opened the Personalist Center for the weekly meetings of Right 2 Survive/Right 2 Dream Too, a group of houseless and formerly houseless individuals and supporters dedicated to teaching about and defending the human, civil and constitutional rights of people experiencing homelessness.



Image Credit: Communitecture

sity, found that there were 1,591 sleeping outside on an average night in Multnomah County. By 2022, that number jumped to 6,633. In order to meet the growing number of folks who rely on organizations like ours to meet their basic needs, we need to expand. We need a bigger, more dignified space, where more people can eat, learn, and organize for change. We need more staff working in that new space, so that no one feels stretched beyond their capacity. We need to create more opportunities for the people that we serve to help themselves and their community thrive through barter work.

How do we get there?

Finding a new home is only the first step. Getting input from our community is just as important. As Mark Lakeman, the designer from communitecture that led the architectural work on the Personalist Center, pointed out, “It’s a good critique of professional culture that people think they know what’s best and want to impose it. People can be very empathetic and have deep life experience, but there’s nothing as sincere, valid, real, and grounded as doing things through [a] participatory process.”

Mark, along with the lead carpenter, Michael D’Angelo, Kate, and Christine Yun, another

2012 Sisters began hosting meetings for a coalition of groups—including Right2Survive, StreetRoots, and Dignity Village—working to organize around passing a Homeless Bill of Rights in Oregon. Sisters continues to advocate for passing this law today.

2017 Sisters begins hosting weekly “hygiene huddles” to discuss solutions to the lack of access to bathrooms, laundry, showers, and other basic hygienic care for people experiencing homelessness. These weekly meetings would eventually lead to the creation of Hygiene 4 All who, in 2020, opened a facility in the Central Eastside Industrial District that offers showers, toilets, a health pod, a clothing and bedding exchange, and waste management.

communitecture architect, all recounted to me a transformative experience around picking the colors used in the space. People were humbled to learn about how certain colors could be triggering for folks with traumatic experiences in institutional spaces like prisons or mental health facilities. Christine remembered there being one full 90 minute meeting dedicated solely to discussing color. That level of care and attention to the ways even small details can impact people will be important for Sisters as we move to a new space. As Michael put it, “Things like colors and smells link to certain emotional states and it’s important to use that power wisely.”

As we move into this next phase, we are committed to listening and inviting people to contribute as we rebuild Sisters in a new space. We want

this to be a project, like Kate described during the construction of the Personalist Center, where every “designer or contractor or donor that got involved in the project [feels] changed by it. Everyone [becomes] part of the community... Everyone who comes in [can] feel what Sisters was about.”

We look forward to a time when volunteers can come together to sand, paint, scrape, sweep, mop, and otherwise help spruce up our new space. We look forward to a time when we can have our own 90 minute meetings about which color to paint things.

More than anything, we look forward to, as Michael said, “see[ing]the space alive, the expressions on people’s faces when they come in, and just [see] the space in use, and the staff and everyone just enjoying it—it coming alive. That’s really what all that work’s about.”



A Welcoming Space

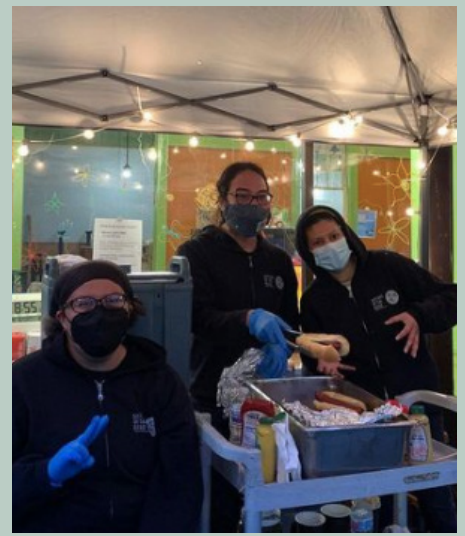
The Personalist Center was originally created as a space to welcome people to Sisters. It gave them a warm, dry spot to hang out during the rainy season in Portland. The center also served as a hub for offering non-meal services, including mail, phone messages, and hygiene supplies.

The space was designed by communitecture, an architectural firm with an activist focus. Sisters previously collaborated with the firm when we worked with Dignity Village. Communitecture was involved early on in creating some of the first tiny houses in the country working with places like Dignity Village and Right 2 Dream Too.

The Personalist Center has changed and evolved over the years, but consistently has provided a welcoming environment for people visiting Sisters. It’s always been a space in which the important work of gathering together, visioning and planning, and organizing to address the root causes of homelessness and poverty has been able to take place.

2022

A year of organizing, outreach, and community building



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