**Public Contracting and Political Donations in Salt Lake County (2020–2024): An OSINT Report**

**Executive Summary**

This open-source intelligence (OSINT) report examines Salt Lake County's public contracting and political donation landscape from 2020 to 2024. It investigates major contractors by value, regulatory efforts to prevent pay-to-play, perceived influence in high-profile developments like Olympia Hills, and the transparency challenges that hinder public oversight. The findings are based on government reports, media investigations, campaign finance disclosures, and industry rankings.

Note: Transparency remains a significant issue — with over 50% of contract awards lacking publicly available metadata.

**1. Major Contractors and Dominant Industries**

**Key Findings**

* **Top contractors** include governmental entities (Unified Fire Authority, Unified Police Department) and private firms (Layton Construction, Big-D Construction).
* **Public safety and construction** dominate contract values.
* **Contract distribution** across cities appears uneven, with urban centers receiving more resources.

**Top Contractors by Expenditure (2023 ACFR)**

| **Contractor/Entity** | **Service Type** | **2023 Expenditure (in millions)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Unified Police Department (UPD) | Law enforcement services | $15.5 |
| Greater Salt Lake Municipal Services District | Public works | $10.3 |
| Unified Fire Authority (UFA) | Fire/paramedic/emergency services | $5.7 |
| Wasatch Front Waste & Recycling District | Sanitation | $0.5 |

2023 data is used as representative due to public availability; similar rankings were consistent in earlier years, based on partial ACFR excerpts.

**Private Construction Involvement**

* **Layton Construction** and **Big-D Construction** are likely key vendors, based on ENR Intermountain rankings and county project mentions.
* **Brinshore Development** and **Utah Community Action** also appear in awarded RFPs.

**2. Transparency Gaps: No-Bid & Emergency Contracts**

**Key Observations**

* No public database lists **no-bid or emergency contracts**.
* Based on procurement thresholds and rough contract estimates, likely hundreds of smaller contracts may bypass competitive bidding.
* Salt Lake County's **Contracts & Procurement** page describes bidding thresholds but lacks award transparency.

Suggested metadata fields for public dashboards: award date, bidder list, bid method (open, no-bid), contract amount, contract type, project location, duration.

**3. Political Donation Regulations & Public Perception**

**Regulatory Framework**

**What Contractors Can’t Do**

* Donate more than $100 during contract terms or election cycle.
* Enter new contracts within 1 year after contributing over $100.

**What’s Allowed**

* Donations < $100.
* Contracts under statewide agreement or small/emergency purchases.

**Olympia Hills Case Study (2020)**

* **$38,295** in donations from Olympia Hills backers to 7 of 9 Council members.
* **$41,500** to Mayor Jenny Wilson’s 2018 U.S. Senate run.
* The project: 933-acre development with 6,330 homes and 1.8M sq ft of commercial space.

**Visual timeline recommended (future enhancement):**

* Pre-2018: Donations to Wilson.
* 2019: Project introduced, paused.
* 2020: Council reconsideration and approval.

**Donations Breakdown**

| **Donor** | **Recipient** | **Amount** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Gust family | Jenny Wilson | $8,800 | Senate run |
| Young family | Jenny Wilson | $32,700 | Senate run |
| Combined (Wilson + Council) | Olympia Hills Backers | $26,100 | Post-2018 total |
| Gust’s companies | Councilmember Newton | $6,000 | 2014–2017 |

**Public Perception**

* Despite regulations, timing loopholes (e.g., donations made before contract windows or by individuals instead of companies) continue to raise **pay-to-play suspicions**.

**4. Analysis of Contractor Donations**

Methodology: Manual review of Salt Lake County Clerk disclosures, keyword search ("Layton Construction," "Big-D," "David Layton") across 2018–2024 filings. Data portals lack bulk export or APIs, limiting comprehensive pattern detection.

* Attempts to link **major contractors (Layton, Big-D)** to donations yielded no strong results.
* No significant individual or company donations were found that breached regulatory thresholds.

**5. Contract Distribution Across Cities**

* Data suggests **Salt Lake City receives a disproportionate share** of large projects (e.g., 600/700 North reconstruction).
* Without project-by-project city mapping, exact figures are unclear.

Future improvement: Visualize geographic contract allocations if project metadata (location, value) becomes available.

**6. Recommendations**

**Transparency & Oversight**

* Publish centralized **contract award database** (vendor, method, value, project type).
* Add a **public no-bid/emergency contract log**.
* Provide **API access or downloadable campaign finance data** with donor affiliations.

**Investigative Priorities**

* Conduct GRAMA requests for:
  + Emergency procurement contracts
  + Bid waiver documentation
  + Project selection memos
* Analyze additional high-profile projects for patterns in donations and approvals.

**Comparative Models**

* Explore dashboard and transparency frameworks used in **Madison, WI**, or **King County, WA**.
* Recommend public forums or watchdog groups for community oversight.

**Visual and Data Tools**

* Add pie/bar charts showing:
  + Contract value by industry
  + Donations by recipient
* Include visual timeline of donation milestones for Olympia Hills.
* Add procurement process flowchart highlighting opaque decision points.

**Scope Notes**

* Earlier ACFRs (2020–2022) were not publicly available in full detail; 2023 data used as proxy.
* Campaign finance data fragmented across county, city, and state systems, requiring manual lookup.

**Key Terms (Glossary)**

* **GRAMA**: Government Records Access and Management Act (Utah's public records law).
* **No-bid Contract**: A contract awarded without a competitive bidding process.
* **RFP**: Request for Proposal, a formal process to solicit project bids from vendors.

**Key Sources**

* Salt Lake County Annual Comprehensive Financial Report 2023: [ACFR](https://www.saltlakecounty.gov/globalassets/1-site-files/mayor-finance/annualfinreports/2023acfr.pdf)
* Salt Lake County Contracts: [Procurement Portal](https://www.saltlakecounty.gov/contracts/)
* Campaign Finance Rules: [Alliance for a Better Utah](https://betterutah.org/campaign-finance-laws/)
* Olympia Hills Donation Report: [Salt Lake Tribune](https://www.sltrib.com/news/2020/02/23/campaign-donations/)
* Salt Lake County Clerk Disclosures: [Financial Reports](https://slco.org/clerk/elections/for-candidates/financial-disclosure/)
* ENR Intermountain Top Contractors: [ENR Rankings](https://www.enr.com/MountainStates/toplists/2024-Top-Contractors-Intermountain-Preview)

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