

The City of Portland is a bad neighbor.

We moved to Multnomah Village in 1996 because it was one of Portland's most affordable neighborhoods. I didn't consider we would become deeply rooted local historians. Outside our bedroom windows is the Jerome F. Sears Armory. When we moved in, the National Guard owned the property. The parking lot was full monthly on weekends for training exercises. A small staff conducted business daily from offices in the armory building. The National Guard was a great neighbor; quiet, considerate, and good at maintaining their property.

Things changed when the City of Portland acquired the property through the Base Re-alignment and Closure (BRAC) Process in 2008-2012. After studying the possibility of developing affordable housing on the site, the City determined that a Portland Bureau of Emergency Management (PBEM) West Side Emergency Operations Center was "extremely important", anticipating that in the next Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake the "particularly vulnerable" west side would be cut off from City emergency equipment and material stored on the east side of the river. Quoting PBEM documents, "The facility was transferred to the City at no cost provided the facility is used, in perpetuity, primarily for emergency response operations. The City Office of Management and Finance is leading the effort to assess planned uses by PBOT, Water Bureau, Fleet, PBEM as well as other city bureaus and work with the local community to develop a site master plan."

Since the City acquired the property, it has not been used "primarily for emergency response operations". It has been an attractive nuisance – the ungated parking lot has often been visited in the middle of the night by drivers doing donuts, used by semi-truck drivers to sleep overnight, and in the daytime by model car enthusiasts racing their rasping vehicles around the lot. During recent City Police Bureau trainings next-door neighbors have been told by officers that it is not safe for their young families to be in their backyards during the large gun and flash bang training. The City has staged major construction projects at the Sears Armory. With the completion of the latest project, we will have logged over five years of noise, 11 hours daily, with sleep disruptions from night-time work. The City used the facility as a temporary (overnight) homeless shelter for six months in 2015-16. Despite having established a "Good Neighbor Agreement", poor management by the City brought idling buses to the site at 5:30am each morning and left mentally ill clients desperately waiting, wailing, and fighting around the building day and night. None of these uses meets the criteria established in the BRAC transfer of the property. The City has not followed through with the development of the West Side Emergency Operations Center. Serving the homeless population was not the "emergency response operation" the BRAC process intended.

After enduring un-neighborly abuse by the City of Portland for ten-plus years, it is aggravating that the City – now represented by City Commissioner Dan Ryan– has tried to shame the neighbors by calling us names – NIMBY – when in fact we have been saying yes to the City for more than ten years. In this residential neighborhood, the City's proposed homeless "Safe Rest Village" is just the latest inappropriate use the City has in mind for the Sears Armory. It seems that, like most abusers, the City is inclined to keep abusing.

The City claims they want community involvement and buy-in. It is time for the City to treat their neighbors with all the dignity and compassion they propose to offer homeless residents of a Safe Rest Village.