

## The Oregonian

### Why arts tax information should be confidential (OPINION)

*By Thomas Lannom*

*February 23, 2016*

The Oregonian/OregonLive editorial board recently published yet [another critical opinion about the Portland arts tax](#) approved by voters in 2012. This time the criticism is about a proposed common-sense change to Portland city code to provide arts tax payers the same basic privacy as any other taxpayer under state or federal law.

Neither the U.S. Internal Revenue Service or the Oregon Department of Revenue (or any other tax collection agency we are aware of) discloses the names and addresses of taxpayers. The change being proposed Wednesday is a step toward extending that same right of confidentiality to local taxpayers.

If simple parity with the confidentiality provisions of other tax codes isn't enough justification, consider the problems associated with releasing taxpayer information.

First, taxpayer data is often misinterpreted and incorrect conclusions can be drawn about why someone is or is not on the list of those who paid. Taxpayers who file and pay using initials for names or variations such as Dick instead of Richard are not going to appear in the data where expected, encouraging incorrect conclusions and potential reputational damage as people browse the published list looking for their boss, neighbor or father-in-law. The same issue applies to data entry errors when people directly file on our website: A person who makes a typing error on their last name is not going to appear to have paid, when in fact they did.

Second, any database with over 400,000 records will have an error rate. Even if that rate is only 1 percent, that makes 4,000 taxpayers that may have erroneous information that then gets distributed to the public.

Third, exempt filers don't have to pay the tax. Releasing their information with those who paid is not accurate. Not releasing their information creates an incomplete picture and invites people to assume they are "scofflaws." And releasing their names in a third category, exempt, publishes for the world that they have specific sources of income, make less than \$1,000 a year, or are in poverty or claiming to be. We see no compelling public interest in having this highly personal information disclosed.

Fourth, releasing the names and addresses of Portland taxpayers creates one more avenue for unsolicited marketing.

Finally, court orders for privacy such as restraining orders, if not received in a timely fashion or entered correctly, could be violated, endangering the physical safety of individuals such as victims of domestic violence.

Tax returns are filed with the expectation of privacy, and we see no reason why the arts tax should be treated differently than any other income tax. Oregon personal income tax payments are hundreds to tens of thousands of times as large as the arts tax and are far more critical to

government operations and the public interest. Why isn't the editorial board objecting to the state keeping that information confidential?

## The Portland Mercury

### Hall Monitor

#### Moving Is the Worst

*By Dirk VanderHart*

*February 24, 2016*

IT WAS NEVER a question whether Central Eastside neighbors would look to stymie Right 2 Dream Too's (R2DToo) attempts to move in. The only variable was how.

And last Thursday, a procession of business owners, real estate developers, and neighborhood representatives answered in booming fashion.

Over the course of a four-hour hearing, they trotted out musty arguments that it's not humane to allow people to sleep in tents, as they do at R2DToo—that the city, as the Portland Business Alliance has begun chanting lately, "can do better."

And there were professed concerns for the safety of anyone who stays at the self-managed homeless rest area if it moves to the proposed city-owned lot—at SE 3rd and Harrison, near the east end of the Tilikum Crossing. Representatives from an adjacent business, East Side Plating, repeatedly raised the specter of perilous spills or explosions in a facility where they spend much of their week.

Mostly there was outrage that an unused industrial plot was being prepped to host a homeless encampment for a decade—the proposed timeline in an agreement between the city and R2DToo. (This last argument has some logic, given the very convenient rationale the city's employed to square the rest area's move with its zoning code.)

What foes of R2DToo's potential relocation never seemed to summon up was a full picture. A nod, for instance, that officials have been working to find R2DToo a reasonable home for years, since the last round of NIMBYism scuttled a deal to keep the camp close to downtown. Or a concession that the rest area will be pushed from its current site under the Chinatown Gate in October regardless of what happens with the Central Eastside plot, and that the city's growing homeless population would be much worse off without it.

That sort of tunnel vision is a mainstay in city hall, which fills up with naysayers at the slightest whisper of changes to parking policy, or density discussions or—more and more lately—decisions on homelessness. Commissioners have seen this before, in other words, and it seemed likely last week that a majority of council would essentially thank the opponents for their perspective, add a clause or two to address some concerns, and finally begin to move R2DToo.

Then it didn't happen.

As Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Amanda Fritz were making final tweaks to a formal resolution, Commissioner Steve Novick voiced reservations. "I would feel more comfortable if we waited on a vote," he said. "There are some conversations I would like to have with staff."

What conversations? Novick kept mum. With what staff? He wouldn't say.

But he's not alone. Commissioner Nick Fish has raised concerns about the city's agreement with R2DToo, and dodged after the hearing when asked how he'd vote. Commissioner Dan Saltzman clearly opposes putting housing money into the camp (which isn't part of the plan), and seemed to have lingering uncertainty. That's a majority of council, if you're keeping track.

The question of whether to move R2DToo comes before commissioners afresh at 2 pm on Wednesday, February 24.

This should be interesting.