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<https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2021/02/01/ceid-column-collaborative-recovery.html>

OPINION

## Opinion: A leading Portland business group calls for a 'collaborative recovery plan'

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What Portlanders haven't been affected by the pandemic? Because of it, we not only face a health crisis but an economic one as well. Among businesses, small businesses — the heart of Portland's economy — are the hardest hit, and they make up a majority of Central Eastside's 1,300 businesses.

In addition, houselessness is predicted to increase by 40% nationally, and that challenge is at least as severe here in Portland.

Local elected leaders need to step up to the challenges we face by creating a clear plan that leads with community safety and reestablishes a baseline of city services. As streets emptied during quarantine, property crime and vandalism have increased. Meanwhile, basic city services that have been visibly lacking over the past few years (911 response, navigators to help the houseless, and mental health care services) have become unreliable and ineffective during COVID.

It will take our entire community working together to come out of this stronger. Leaders need to leverage the resources of our



CATHY CHENEY|@PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

Kate Merrill and co-author Michael Larkin said the Central Eastside Industrial Council's program can provide insights into helping the rest of the city recover from pandemic-spurred economic and safety issues.

innovative, entrepreneurial businesses and nonprofits to create a clearinghouse for the community to contribute and collaborate.

Our businesses want to show up for their community. As the Central Eastside Industrial District grew into a major economic center in the last decade, with nearly 23,000 jobs, the district experienced increased challenges around transportation, affordable housing, cleanliness and safety. Central Eastside's business community responded to these challenges in 2019 by creating an Enhanced Service District to directly contribute to the district's vitality. All property managers/owners pay a fee which goes directly to services like cleaning, safety, graffiti abatement and community grants. The business association, Central Eastside Industrial Council, oversees the services, which began district-wide in October 2019.

The ESD's name, Central Eastside Together, reflects the vision for today's ESD. What sets it apart are the innovative programs and specifically its trauma informed lens. Our unarmed Safety for All Team builds relationships in the community centering on trauma informed care and conflict de-escalation. Many people use Safety for All as an alternative to calling police in non-emergency situations: the Team engaged in more than 14,800 interactions and responded to 500 calls for service in the first year.

Their embedded Care Team works directly with people experiencing houselessness to navigate health care, housing and employment opportunities and has distributed sanitation kits and masks during Covid. Our cleaning teams, through Central City Concern's Clean Start mentored work program, clean up on average 40,000 pounds of trash in the district every month.

Our ESD is working on some of Portland's hardest issues by leveraging resources and forming partnerships with public and nonprofit partners. Business communities across the area could use our model to increase resiliency, as willing community partners.

But the business community, even united in service of our community, can't thrive without the help of our local governments. Our ESD and the vitality of our district are in peril. Without basic services restored in the area and a road map for addressing public

safety, our work will no longer be able to “enhance” the district and businesses will lose faith. Our work should and could never replace the basic services that our city and county need to provide.

For Portland to recover, safety for the whole community needs to be prioritized. Our most vulnerable need access to services and to be treated with dignity. Our small businesses need to be able to open their doors without finding a broken window or vandalism each morning. Our workforce needs to feel safe commuting to their jobs.

A collaborative recovery plan that leads with community safety and equity is the only way we can come out of Covid stronger together.

*Kate Merrill is executive director of the Central Eastside Industrial Council and Central Eastside Together. Michael Larkin is a real estate asset manager with NAI Elliot and board president of Central Eastside Together.*