

# City will help 4 of Tenderloin's 70 mom-and-pops

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selling anything they do now, though Mar's hope is that gradually they will shift to healthier products.

Jorge Rivas, Office of Economic and Workforce Development project manager, told the Land Use Committee that \$60,000 from OEWD will be available for the first year "for an array of things like additional workshops, additional hand-holding for the merchants and also some major overhauls of current stores." Up to four stores might be part of the transformation, he said.

Rivas manages OEWD's Invest in Neighborhoods project, the source of the \$60,000, and he is likely to become the go-to city staffer for merchants, Pagonalos told The Extra.

The Public Health Department's Promotion and Prevention branch is the other major player in the incentives program. Involved for decades in discouraging tobacco use and championing better nutrition, it is staffing the new program's setup.

Programs similar to Mar's are operating in the East Bay and have a longer history on the East Coast. A 600-member nationwide Healthy Corner Stores Network grew from a 2004 initiative begun by the Food Trust in Philadelphia.

## KICKSTART FROM BAYVIEW

Mar's ordinance got a kickstart early this year from media coverage of the Bayview Healthy Stores Project, a push for healthier, reasonably priced food in 20 corner stores as well as in four larger grocery stores in the neighborhood like Fresh & Easy and Smart & Final.

The Tenderloin coalition has used the work in Bayview as a model for its version of what a corner store should look like — adapting it to fit the differences of neighborhood density, geography and demographics — and also as a demonstration of the project's viability, says Health Educator Susana Hennessey-Lavery, the Department of Public Health's point person on the incentives program. "It's a comprehensive model that shows how community and city government and business can work together for change," she says.

To create his legislation, Mar looked to Hennessey-Lavery's office for help, she told The Extra, primarily because of Promotion and Prevention's participation in the Bayview project and her longtime tenure in the city's Tobacco Free Project.

Here in the Tenderloin, the project is being implemented by the Tenderloin Healthy Corner Store Coalition. Members include the Vietnamese Youth Development Center, TNDC, North of Market/TL CBD, Youth Leadership Institute, Central City SRO Collaborative, DPH's Tobacco Free Project and Feeling Good nutrition program, National Council on Alcoholism Bay Area, Heart of the City Farmers Market, and A.A.I.M.S., a project of DPH Community Behavioral Health Services.

The behind-the-scenes work goes back to 2011 when the Vietnamese Youth Development Center, a breeding ground on Eddy Street for emerging neighborhood advocates, started a Team Let's Stop Tobacco project, funded by the Tobacco Free Project.

Eleven young people counted and mapped 46 TL tobacco outlets, checking to see if they were complying with city regulations about posting retail tobacco licenses and limiting tobacco and alcohol advertising to no more than a third of a storefront. They also checked each store for fresh fruits and vegetables.

When the Tenderloin coalition began meeting last year, the Vietnamese Youth Development Center joined and became an invaluable resource. The center was awarded two grants, \$30,000 from the San Francisco Foundation and \$25,000 from health care

provider Dignity Health, to survey residents, assess corner stores and transform the first store as a pilot project. Funding to redesign subsequent stores will come from OEWD. Jessica Estrada, the center's advocacy specialist, says Mar's ordinance wasn't on the table when her group applied for the grants.

The coalition hired five residents as Tenderloin Food Justice Leaders — Fred Dejamco, Stephen Tennis, Michelle Tran, Sheila Wheeler and Tammy Wong. With the help of DPH's Feeling Good project, they assessed corner stores using an 11-page form to track the type and quality of products sold in six food categories, product placement, cleanliness, physical accessibility, acceptance of food stamps and WIC, tobacco and alcohol sales, advertisements, consumer education, community investment and fair labor practices.

The resulting 12-page "Healthy Shopping Guide" is a multipurpose tool: Residents can see which stores carry the healthiest food, the Food Justice Leaders will use the guide to educate merchants about their scores, and the scores will help the coalition narrow the search for the first store to be redesigned under the program.

"We expect to choose that first one by early fall," Thayer told The Extra. "First, we'll get the stores down to 10, using steering committee-developed criteria and community feedback from the dot mapping."

The dot activity is what greeted the crowd at the coalition's July 11 coming-out party. Attendees were asked to place sticky dots on a Tenderloin map — blue ones where they felt safe shopping, yellow ones where they'd like a healthy store.

The 10 stores will be winnowed to three this month. Food Justice Leaders are returning to the stores they surveyed with feedback packets and asking merchants if they want to be part of the pilot. Sutti Associates, the redesign consultant, then will evaluate the three for adaptability and with the coalition select the one deemed most likely to succeed.

## HOW REDESIGN WORKS

"One of our biggest roles, and one of our greatest challenges, is to gain the small store owners' trust," said Larry Brucia, president and CEO of Sutti Associates, 30 years in the business. "Merchants fear change. They hear 'less alcohol and cigarettes and more produce,' and we have to give them comfort, assure them that we won't be talking about dropping any of their current inventory and that they won't lose money."

At least not in the long run, if the change succeeds.

While the Food Justice Leaders will help plan food selection with merchants, Brucia and his colleagues will "reschematize" the stores, he says. With the 35%/20% selling area requirements as a goal, they'll measure the space and existing shelving, suggest which items need to be rearranged, identify where new items will go and how best to display them. Once changes have been approved and storage units ordered, the physical transformation takes no more than two days, Brucia says.

Mar's program, the ordinance co-sponsored by Supervisors Jane Kim, Malia Cohen, and David Chiu, is getting under way at a time when an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables is available to TL residents. It may not be steps away from their homes, but it's not far.

The Heart of the City Farmers Market teems with produce — as well as fresh fish twice a week — and 88% of residents in the coalition's survey say they regularly shop there. And at the end of every market day, farmers donate hundreds of pounds of fresh stuff

to the neighborhood.

Food pantries are another ready source of healthy food. Of the SF Food Bank's 240 pantries citywide, 33 are in the Tenderloin, where annually, the pantries distribute 2.4 million pounds of food, enough for 2,769 people a week, most living in supportive or senior-only housing. Still, more good food can only benefit a neighborhood as needy as the Tenderloin.

"The presence of a large number

of stores selling low-quality foods in a community can undermine public efforts to promote health," states Mar's ordinance. "[It sends] a message that normalizes the use of unhealthy products in that neighborhood."

July 30, the full Board of Supervisors unanimously passed the legislation that will transform about 5% of the corner stores in the Tenderloin. ■

— Brian Rinker and Jon Newman contributed to this report.

## 120 hear report on big 1st year

The savory aroma of sweet potato and black bean chili filled the 201 Turk Community Room for the coalition's July 11 curtain-raiser — members "report back" to the community. Food was as much a highlight as the presentations.

Samples of healthy foods ringed the room: hummus for dipping raw vegetables and whole-grain tortilla chips, dates, strawberries and water flavored with masses of sliced citrus. A long line stretched out for the sweet potato and black bean chili, served up with brown rice and kale salad by A.A.I.M.S. volunteers Robert Harris, Vera Pittman and others.

Nearby was a table laden with the chili's ingredients — onions, garlic, spices, lime, tomatoes, corn and, of course, sweet potatoes and black beans — and behind these a white board listing what each ingredient would cost to make enough to feed four people. The total was an economical \$8.02, or \$2.19 per serving.

When the 120 people at the event settled down, coalition coordinators Jessica Estrada and Ryan Thayer, TNDC staff representative, described

how center youth and coalition members spent a month last year surveying clients' purchasing habits: where they bought most of their groceries, snacks, alcohol and tobacco; how much that cost them monthly; whether they would buy groceries in a corner store if they were affordable; if they shop in the TL and why; if they don't, the top three reasons; and what would make them "more likely" to shop close to home. The surveys, in English, Chinese, Vietnamese and Spanish, also were administered at community events.

Among the survey results from 640 residents: 88% buy most of their fresh produce from the Farmers Market. Less than a quarter buy dairy, protein and whole wheat products in the neighborhood. More than half those who shop in the Tenderloin do so because it's convenient. And they spend at least half their grocery money outside the TL. Expanding that stat to the Tenderloin's 17,000 households, the coalition estimates that residents spend almost \$1 million monthly elsewhere. ■

— Marjorie Beggs



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