

# Forced-out nonprofit stymied by NIMBYism

## Rent got raised, now neighbors complain

By MARJORIE BEGGS

IT'S BEEN EIGHT MONTHS since central city nonprofits went before the supervisors' Budget and Finance Committee to tell how they, like some residents, are being gentrified out of the neighborhood. Follow-up on one — Hyde Street Community Services — suggests that reversing the situation will be hard-won.

It's a case study in the growing problem of nonprofit displacement: Raised rents force providers out of long-time quarters, and suitable new space is tougher to find. NIMBYism increases the difficulty, as does landlords who won't rent to programs serving mental health and substance abuse clients.

Human services providers for at least two years have been unofficially barred from Market Street offices by landlords and property managers who turn up their noses at scruffy people in and out of their building all day long. Now Hyde Street Community Services is facing neighbors who don't want the program moving up the hill.

After serving mental health clients at 134 Golden Gate Ave. for 10 years, Hyde Street was facing an impossible-to-afford rent raise when its lease expires in September. The search was on.

### RENT SET TO DOUBLE

Cindy Gyori, executive director of the 39-year-old nonprofit, says she pays about \$27,000 per month for 18,000 square feet — \$18.27 per square foot per year.

"In talking with the landlord, he wanted to double the rent and preferred to rent the entire building," Gyori says. "Relocation is a huge issue for an organization like ours. We weren't just looking for offices — we have special needs for the people we serve."

More than 1,200 clients a year, many homeless, use Hyde Street's health clinic for individual and group counseling, medication evaluation, monitoring and maintenance, emergency psychiatric care, socializing and recovering from substance abuse.

Besides Hyde Street's space, 134 Golden Gate Ave. has a built-out basement that adds another 9,000 square

feet. North of Market Community Benefits District leased an office there as well as the Film Collective, an "incubator" project of the city's Film Commission. CBD Director Dina Hilliard told The Extra that her group, too, had been looking for permanent space elsewhere and, unable to find it, moved out of 134 at the end of June to take up temporary lodging with the Center for New Music at 55 Taylor St. The Film Collective has disbanded, Hilliard says.

When word got out that 134 Golden Gate's owner was looking for a single tenant, another nonprofit surfaced quickly: Larkin Street Youth Services — a 30-year-old organization with 25 programs at 15 sites around the city where more than 4,000 homeless and at-risk kids get help with housing, education, employment and health needs.

### LARKIN STREET STEPS IN

Larkin Street had been looking for three years for a site where it could consolidate its drop-in, education and employment programs and administrative offices, wrote Executive Director Sherilyn Adams in an email. "The current commercial rental market is a very difficult one to navigate and our specific needs — size, location, affordability in both rent and tenant improvement aspects — only made our search harder." Its lease at 134 is for 15 years.

Neither she nor the building's owner would disclose the rental rate.

Gyori says she bears Larkin Street no ill will: "I know Larkin Street has wanted to accommodate their programs under one roof. And the owner understandably wanted to rent the entire building, something we just couldn't do."

Hyde Street needed to stay in or near the central city, home base to most of its clients. Gyori searched all over the Tenderloin and looked South of Market, but saw nothing affordable.

Early this year, she found two floors at 815 Hyde St., a three-story former medical services building between Bush and Sutter streets a block down the hill from St. Francis Memorial Hospital. The 9,000-square-foot space and its price — \$28.05 a square foot — fit the bill, and Hyde Street negotiated a lease with the landlord scheduled to begin in August.

Halving the amount of space, Gyori says, won't be a problem: Service and staff cuts in recent years meant that Hyde Street has been underutilizing much of its space at 134 Golden Gate. Though the rental rate is a third more, Gyori will save more than \$6,000 a month with the move.

### HYDE STREET BACK ON HYDE

The irony of Hyde Street Community Services returning to Hyde Street isn't lost on Gyori. For 27 years, the agency was at 251 Hyde, "and we moved out after the two owners of the building sued each other."

The proposed new location is within the appropriate service area for clients, who can get there on two bus lines without difficulty, Gyori told the Health Commissions Finance Committee.

She was presenting at the June 17 committee meeting because, to allay neighbors' concerns, DPH contractors must get the department's approval to relocate services, significantly expand them or open new ones.

In 1998, S.F. voters passed Proposition I, the Citizens' Right-to-Know Act, also called the Good Neighbor Policy, which attempts to stop NIMBY — not in my backyard — before it gets out of hand. Providers have to notify DPH of pending moves or changes. Then, 30 days before DPH meets to consider approval, the provider has to post signs on and around the site telling about the incoming program, the date for a community meeting to discuss concerns and the Health Commission approval meeting date. The program hosts the meeting, answers neighbors' questions and seeks their okay to relocate, which is on the agenda of the next Health Commission meeting.

Sean Nguyen, DPH's manager for contract compliance and community programs, told the health commissioners that everything was done in a timely fashion: Notices were posted and Hyde Street staff had distributed flyers in the neighborhood in a one-block radius.

Five neighbors spoke during the public comment period, and all asked for a continuance. They were insufficiently notified, they said, and couldn't muster their opposition in time for the meeting.

"The problems of the Tenderloin are moving up the hill and causing us a lot of problems," said a man who said he is a

member of Save Our Streets.

Said another, "I live a half-block away. We already have the Granada Hotel next door (on Sutter) with drug abusers and a homeless shelter a block away. And this is an historic building." (The building indeed has a plaque: "In 1904 this building served as the East Exchange Telephone Company.... It is the only known pre-fire building in this district to completely survive the earthquake of 1906.")

A third speaker said he'd been to 134 Golden Gate and found the street "a sea of shopping carts. The possibility of this population migrating to our neighborhood is appalling."

Hyde Street board member Mark Davey addressed the commissioners and the public: "We complied with all the regulations about notifications. I'm very concerned that people are suggesting that our clinic is the cause of the conditions on Golden Gate Avenue."

### HEALTH DIRECTOR'S SOLUTION

At this point, DPH Director Barbara Garcia stepped in. She acknowledged that the speakers just want to know that Hyde Street is following the Good Neighbor Policy.

"We're strong on this process," Garcia said, "and the neighbors need contact with the organization — I see this working out over time." She asked Gyori the implications of delaying DPH approval for another month. Tenant improvements will take about three weeks, the next meeting isn't until mid-July and Hyde Street must vacate 134 by September, Gyori responded.

"We require deep engagement with your neighbors — they might be your neighbors for another 20 years," she told Gyori, then directed Nguyen to work both sides.

To the protesting neighbors she added, "This is an excellent program with excellent supervision of staff and clients."

Gyori agreed to meet with neighbors twice to try to reach some understanding. Their first meeting was scheduled for June 26.

"I say failure is not an option," she said. "We'll make this work." ■

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