

March to City Hall kicks off Tenderloin safety plan

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we will be heard," said Elaine Zamora TL benefit district manager.

The neighborhood has suddenly changed. It no longer is the neutral zone of rampant but nonviolent street and doorway drug transactions. Armed gang members, squeezed out of other neighborhoods, or not, are entering our hood and playing rough.

The latest drug-connected fatality was April 25. A 38-year-old man was shot to death at Hyde and Turk streets shortly after midnight in a drug-money dispute. It followed a homicide April 14. A bystander, Lena Allen, 54, who lived at the Baldwin House Hotel on Sixth Street, was the victim of a gun battle's stray shots on Ellis Street. April 13, a 16-year-old Oakland boy was slain execution-style in front of the doughnut shop on Golden Gate Avenue across from the Post Office.

These slayings occurred despite stepped-up police patrols that began in late December after a shootout on Turk Street between Taylor and Mason that the SFPD Gang Force determined to be gang-related. The unanswered question then was whether it signaled a change, or was an anomaly. And now, we have the answer.

TNT is also up in arms over the high traffic accident rate and especially concerned about the safety of schoolchildren and seniors. A Muni fatality the morning of April 3 only intensified fears. A 27-Bryant bus killed a 49-year-old woman crossing Ellis at Leavenworth.

GOLDEN GATE GROUP FORMS

Concern over neighborhood conditions began rising to new levels last year in community organizations. A quickly formed group calling itself Golden Gate Service Providers met in October at the YMCA and determined their leading issues along deteriorating Golden Gate Avenue were drug dealers, sidewalk safety, bad lighting and cleanliness. The group of nine represented: the Y, Morty's Delicatessen, the North of Market/TL Community Benefit District, Tenderloin Housing Clinic, St. Anthony Foundation, Hastings College of Law, Tenderloin Health and De Marillac Academy. They sent a memo to the mayor's office asking for increased police foot and bike patrols and more surveillance cameras on building corners. But as of May 2, they hadn't gotten a reply.

"I've been around since 1982," says Hastings CFO David Seward, who attended the meeting. "I do not remember the same level of gun violence, particularly in the Golden Gate Avenue area. The number of shootings seems way up."

Noted at the meeting, too, was a more aggressive approach to the drug scene. "Residents are starting a campaign to confront drug dealers" through community watch, the minutes said.

Drugs, traffic safety and violence dominated the attention of the throngs who attended the Safety Plan Kick-Off. The meeting, two months in the making, was first suggested by Safety Network Partnership community organizer Dina Hilliard. She formed a working committee of volunteers and, as preparation for closer work with the police, also arranged for Police Academy instructors to come to the TL station Community Room and give free, three-hour courses on three Saturdays in April on: Gangs and Narcotics, Emergency Communication and General Orders & The Law. These normally are 15-hour academy courses.

"It's the first time (the academy) has done this," Hilliard said. "And now the Mission and Bayview want them. We averaged about 15 people per session and would've had more but the classes weren't confirmed until a week before the first one started."

DRUGS, TRAFFIC SAFETY, VIOLENCE

Before entering the meeting room to come up with the Safety Plan, people ranging from old-timers to new mothers signed in at welcoming tables. They were given the agenda, a volunteer form to fill out, a Safety March flyer and two adhesive red dots for voting for their two priority concerns.

The top three vote-getters were: Drugs, 125; Traffic-Pedestrian Safety, 98; and Violence, 79. Counted, too, were some prior votes through a Web site and a written form on the Safety Plan flyer. TNDC's Tomiquia Moss, acting as emcee, said discussion groups would form around them in the one big room. The group leaders were: Terrance Alan, Violence; Elaine Zamora, Drugs; and Hilliard, Safety.

The sessions were often raucous. Anxious people talked over each other, ignoring the ground rules of etiquette. A Russian interpreter hooked up to five Russian participants with listening devices at the Drugs session talked simultaneously as loud as the speakers.

"I'm concerned about personal retaliation," said one man in the Violence group.

"You don't have to worry," a woman said in reply. "They're killing each other."

"Why are some people victims and others aren't?" came a question.

"I remember when I was young," said a tall black man. "The frailest got picked on. I think the elderly should be given badges so they wouldn't be preyed upon."

"Whenever I'm followed," said one woman, "I pull out a can of Mace and let them see it. But sometimes they throw things at you."

At the Drugs session they talked of boycotting businesses that don't follow good practices.

"I'm playing chess every day with children's lives," said one teacher who walks children through the neighborhood.

"I heard this all two years ago," said one man. "Get the legislation to stop drug traffic on the street. Otherwise we're talking in circles."

In the Violence group, Alan said, "Give the (TL police) captain the tools to fight back."

"Get legislation passed for more foot patrols," said activist Michael Nulty, standing and practically shouting to be heard. "Ask for a hearing. Close the loopholes on loitering and ask the courts to cooperate. Hold the judges responsible."

The groups voted on their lists. Tops for the Safety group was to meet with Chris Daly and other supervisors to get TL crosswalks repainted. Next was putting volunteer crossing guards at streets near schools.

The Drugs session bit off the biggest challenge: getting 10,000 signatures on a "strongly worded" petition saying the TL wants a higher quality of life and is not a "containment zone," or dumping ground, for the poor and needy. Signers didn't have to be TL residents, either. The petition would be delivered to the supervisors the day of the march. It was ready to be circulated May 2.

The Violence group aimed to make cards identifying merchants as partners against violence with the residents. The cards would be put in the merchants' windows. And they were going to organize escorts for kids groups that walk through the Tenderloin.

A delighted Capt. Jimenez came to the front of the room and applauded the group.

POLICE CAPTAIN: 'GOOD LUCK'

"This is the best and most impressive of all the community groups I've gone to," he said. He promised to discuss the group's solutions with his lieutenants. "Good luck at City Hall," he said. "Your support means a lot to me and the officers who work here."

Seniors and parents in the neighborhood continue to rail about speeding and reckless traffic. They often bring up the death of two youngsters killed in traffic last year near Little Saigon. Then the April 3 Muni bus fatality at Leavenworth and Ellis heightened tensions. The Transportation Authority's Tenderloin-Little Saigon Neighborhood Transportation Plan published in March earmarks the intersection for traffic-calming bus bulbs — but that could be two years away.

In community meetings, Jimenez says that the significant change in the neighborhood can only come from citizens' action. Increasingly, Jimenez gets an earful about shameful quality-of-life issues such as

public urination and defecation, drunkenness, group loitering and surly behavior that can make a walk through the neighborhood a nightmare.

"The Board of Supervisors say the homeless can use the sidewalk," Jimenez said at an April 18 TL station meeting on the Mayor's Violence Prevention Strategic Plan. Conducted by the Mayor's Office on Criminal Justice, the meeting was to glean information to develop a three- to five-year Violence Prevention Strategic Plan applicable to each neighborhood. The feedback determines guiding policies and funding priorities. A summary report is due in June.

"But people call and say get rid of them — the same ones who voted in the supervisors," he continued to the eight people at the table. "Maybe it's time to go back to the supervisors and rethink this. If the supervisors had this on their block they might think differently. Part of my job is to be impartial — we're prohibited from addressing the problem. But you can get it changed."

THE NEW WRINKLE

Dale Butler who lives at the Hamilton Apartments added what has been said for years in the Tenderloin, but included the new wrinkle.

"We need to get groups of drug dealers off the streets," he said. "But I'm not going to ask people to go over and write down their names on a clipboard — they've got guns." He laughed nervously.

Jimenez said if the police can't find a place to keep arrested drug dealers, "then we'll need policemen on every block, 24-7."

At the same meeting the captain showed he's not about to let up on nonviolent crimes, either. That day he said six of his officers gave 43 citations for traffic violations in a six-hour period.

On April 12, 15 people at a Community Leadership Alliance meeting at the Tenderloin station discussed creating community patrols and neighborhood watch groups. Safety Network's Hilliard said she was looking for volunteers to patrol the Tenderloin on foot.

Gary Delagnes, president of the S.F. Police Officers Association, told The Extra later that police encourage citizen walk-alongs or ride-alongs, as long as they sign waivers.

"But you want to be pretty careful if you are identifying people," Delagnes said. "You don't want to be seen. And any help is appreciated."

"Witness protection hasn't really been successful," said resident Michael Pedersen. "How can you do this in a neighborhood of this character? You might be living in the same building with that person and see him on the stairs."

What Delagnes didn't like was the mayor's stance against helping the feds go after illegal aliens here.

"If you don't prosecute illegal aliens," he said, "it affects the quality of life. Most arrests in certain areas of the TL are illegal Hispanic aliens."

The 16-year-old who was shot in the head at the doughnut shop at Golden Gate and Hyde had been "accosted by three Latin males," according to Capt. Jimenez's April 27 newsletter report. A surveillance camera had recorded the activity. The camera was up about 10 feet on the southeast corner on a Hastings College building. It had gone up a week before the Golden Gate Avenue slaying, a change brought through the nonprofits' concern for the street. ■

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