



Litany of need: Housing, health care, higher pay, safety

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the meeting. “You can count on me to fight for the low- and moderate-income San Franciscans, and I’ll be looking out for health care interests like San Francisco General Hospital with Mitch Katz, even as state and federal dollars are cut.

“We need to look at a radical new vision and I’m hoping that your testimony today will help point us in the right direction.”

This budget meeting was to have been held at the Tenderloin Police Station, but since it accommodates only 80 people, Daly’s office arranged to use Freedom Hall at Glide. The Finance Committee had invited various city officials to attend this meeting so they could hear directly from their constituents. And they got an earful:

“You know that there are 9,800 seniors on the waiting list for housing units. There are 20,000 individuals of all ages in need of housing,” said Shirley Bierly, board member of Senior Action Network. “We’re asking for \$36 million for new housing to be added to last year’s housing budget to cover this need. And we’re asking that from the bottom of our hearts. We hope you hear us.”

“There is a need for housing on all levels — very low, low, moderate,” agreed Supervisor Leno. “There are also people who make \$80,000 a year who can’t live in the city.”

Doug Marshall, resident: “The Tenderloin has negative images — mostly we’re regarded as people who deal drugs and are prostitutes. As long as that image is there, the [budget money] that could come into the Tenderloin will not come. We can help ourselves — it has to come from within.”

Bike messenger Marc Salomon, who ran for District 6 supervisor, said he fears for his life when he has to ride on Market Street. “We need to fund a study on how we’re going to make Market Street viable. . . . You see crosswalks in Moscone Center for the tourists, when the people who are getting

killed are over here.”

Salomon also called for community-based land grants, the development of solar power and, in health care, treatment on demand, which, he said, “is cheaper than coming out the back of the emergency room.”

Dr. Helen Chen, medical director at San Francisco General Hospital Adult Medical Center: “Services have suffered because of cuts. . . . I tried to get a mammogram for one of my patients yesterday. The next available appointment is September. For calling in a cancer screen, I’ve been told to call back at the end of the summer. Mental health services: Try back in two or three months. . . . And we’re losing medical staff. Many gifted [nurses] have left because they are just bone-weary of fighting for the basic rights and services that our patients deserve.”

“We continue to have a very serious problem confronting all of us as [mental health] contractors,” said Conard House Executive Director Richard Heasley. “Your service system is unraveling because this budget — as last year’s budget and the budget before that — ignores the needs of your contractors. . . . My agency had a 42% turnover among staff. We couldn’t fill positions because the wages are too low.”

Constance Bach, a member of the Living Wage Coalition: “The city is making an effort [to meet this need]. You may be surprised, as I was, that in San Francisco the minimum wage should be \$17 [an hour] in order for a worker to get a two-bedroom efficiency apartment. . . . For a person [with a full-time job] to be out on the street or to have to take a second job, to be always working, it’s not right, not humane.”

Kary Ditman, Treasure Island Homeless Development Initiative: “We are lacking many services on Treasure Island. There are 3,200 people living on the island now, 450 formerly homeless families and very low-income adults. We have nothing out there for the teen-agers, for example. Please put us in the

budget,” she said.

“We really need to be fully funded,” commented a South of Market Recreation Center rep. Among the Center’s many contributions to the city: “It housed the Raymond Hotel tenants after their fire. The Red Cross uses it. It’s the only public recreation facility South of Market.” The rep also called for support of the San Francisco Veterans Equity Center. “It provides services to Filipino World War II veterans. It’s the only service center of its kind in the nation.”

“We’re home to 45 nonprofit and arts organizations. . . . We’re one of a number of buildings in the city that are under threat of nonrenewal of leases. We’re afraid we’re going to lose our building and our community services,” said Betty Traynor from the Redstone Building at 16th and Mission. “We’re asking the city to be a partner with us — we’ve been told that we don’t have the muscle, the experience to pull off purchasing our building. . . . If the city could come up with some creative solutions for us, maybe issue revenue bonds, we’d be very grateful.”

Several people spoke about the need for quality day care programs. Said one: “There isn’t one day care here in the city that doesn’t have a long waiting list.” Added another: “We can’t provide living wages for teachers, and they are leaving. We need to retain these quality [professionals] to help our young people to grow.”

Judith Baker, director of South of Market Child Care, said that children may get a new teacher every month. “Many of these children have no stability — they’ve been in foster care or shelters,” she said. “Also, in South of Market, we have a park, but there’s no staff, so parents are afraid to send their children there.”

Jacob Jacobs, TL resident: “I live around the corner and I’m disabled. Sometimes disabled people really need to get to the restroom quick. When I go to the people in the Muni, they say that because the restrooms aren’t up to [ADA] code, they’re all

closed. I’m for the ADA, but I’d hope that somehow we can find the money to have restrooms in Muni.”

Edwin Jockson, executive director, West Bay Filipino Multi Service Center: “The Filipino American community in San Francisco lost over 10,000 members in the last 10 years. Gentrification is one reason; another reason is the lack of services. . . . Many students are failing in school, and they need assistance.”

Rev. Williams made a plea to keep the Tenderloin for the people: “Gentrification [in the Tenderloin] may be a serious problem. . . . We have a great community that’s growing at this time — let’s keep the people here, no matter what their color, no matter how unreliable they may seem. Keep the people here, fight it.”

Glide volunteer Christina Alarcon told how the church had helped her get off the street. She has two grandkids and four adopted children of African American, Chinese, Hispanic and Filipino descent. They are in foster homes but visit her on the weekends.

“Everybody is in need of funding. I think they need electricity mostly,” Alarcon joked. “Look how hot it is.” Working with Glide’s outreach programs, Alarcon does what she can for people who need a hand. “That’s what I love about [Cecil Williams]. He sends his people out there to find those in need, who want to be somebody. . . and that’s what I’m gonna do.”

RADCo, the Rental Assistance Disbursement component of the Eviction Defense Collaborative, distributed flyers describing its programs, which preserve affordable housing in San Francisco and prevent evictions.

“We provide financial assistance in the form of loans [for rent] to responsible, often very long-term tenants — 350 households last year,” said RADCo Rental Assistance Coordinator Liz Thornton. “Without our assistance, these people who are families, singles, working

people, people with disabilities, would be on the streets or they’d be living in shelters.” RADCo, Thornton said, is not included in the 2001–02 San Francisco budget, but it should be.

“I’m a tenant next door,” said Steve Adams who’s lived in the Tenderloin for two years. “Without RADCo, I wouldn’t have been able to pay my rent — I could be homeless right now. Don’t close it, please don’t close it.”

Jeff Shannon, an intern and training manager at Jail Psychiatric Services, part of the Haight Ashbury Free Clinics and jail health services: “It is really important that we attract and retain the most professional health folks that we can — we do evaluations on people who the most disenfranchised folks in our community. Last year, we lost 37% of our employees, many to county positions, which pay a lot better than nonprofits. I’m here to ask that money be put back into the budget so we can keep our staff and carry out our mission to provide culturally appropriate, comprehensive services to inmates in San Francisco prisons.”

Twenty-one-year-old Carla Espinoza urged funding of the Youth Space Project South of Market: “I was born and raised in San Francisco and I’m here representing all the young people. . . . [The project] is for young people to come and just chill instead of just wandering on the streets. It’s also a place to get educated, do some art projects, gather for a community event, enjoy the positive things that young people do. A lot of young people are affected by homelessness, poverty, police brutality — this is a space for them, to support them.”

In the end, scores of people — teens to the elderly, tenants and service providers — spoke at the meeting, making their case for District 6 needs. It was as Supervisor Daly had said at the evening’s start: “This meeting, out in the neighborhoods, is about bringing the voice of everyday San Franciscans to City Hall.” ■

