

TL captain asks supes for loitering law

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that came to fruition. A peace march to City Hall was another. On May 8, 200 people dramatized their fears by walking recent homicide and accident sites before ending inside the Board of Supervisors' chamber with a plea for safety.

Hilliard told the committee the neighborhood wanted the Crisis Response Network brought in. This nonprofit problem solver operates in the Western Addition, Bayview-Hunters Point and the Mission.

TNT looked forward also, she said, to the mayor's proposed Community Justice Center to deal with quality of life issues, and asked for it to be located in the Tenderloin.

"People are forced to live in fear, like ghetto-ization," David Seward, chief financial officer of Hastings Law School, told the supes. "Violence has increased. A drug war is in the neighborhood and it's incumbent on the city to come together to address this."

Clark Dawood, dean of Student Affairs at the Art Institute of California-San Francisco at 1170 Market St., said the school's 1,500 students and 250 faculty thread their way daily through U.N. Plaza under random threats of violence. "Three weeks ago there was a shooting outside," he said. School President James Campbell asked the committee: "What can we do on a short-term basis?"

Just "to traverse the landscape" is difficult, said lawyer Elaine Zamora, who runs the Tenderloin Community Benefit District out of her 118 Jones St. office, a Safe Haven. "We need help to make our neighborhood livable."

One middle-age man who walks through the TL on his way to his Union Square job said he accidentally bumped into a man, turned to apologize and saw a hypodermic needle hanging in the man's arm.

Randy Shaw, Tenderloin Housing Clinic executive director, stepped to the mike to testify. Shaw said a few minutes ago he'd been in his office watching the hearing on SFGTV and felt compelled to walk over to City Hall and publicly endorse Capt. Jimenez — because no one had yet mentioned Jimenez, his enthusiasm and contribution to the Tenderloin. The room burst into applause. Shaw said he was happy that Jimenez — originally an interim replacement for Capt. Kathryn Brown — had not been among Chief Heather Fong's reassignments of station commanders.

"Captains come and go," Shaw said. "What we need is continuity. Capt. Jimenez is so motivated it's like a personal mission."

Jimenez came to the podium, as glad for the approval as the fact, he said later, that no one called for more neighborhood police. In his 10 months heading the station, his officers have turned in record arrest numbers, but other dealers rush in to take

up the slack, he says. He has been continually frustrated by the drug and quality of life issues that overwhelm his department. The most recent figures show that calls for service in the neighborhood jumped 22% in the first eight months of 2007 over last year.

He made it clear to the committee that he wants legislation enabling his officers to clear the sidewalks of drug dealers, panhandlers, drunks, crazies, encampments and sleepers. Having to walk a daily "gauntlet," he told the supervisors, depresses and terrorizes families, seniors and the disabled, while appalling everyone else.

In a rising voice he said his department makes "more arrests per capita than anywhere in America." But the justice system, he added, doesn't mete out meaningful consequences for violators.

"But laws can make it illegal to loiter," Jimenez said. "I think people want it." He has heard for months at community meetings in his police station and elsewhere how sick and tired people are of the filthy, threatening streets.

"It's the environment," Jimenez said. And a lot of the victims are the weak and vulnerable. "And there's not a damn thing we can do about it."

"I sure as hell need a lot of help with the environment."

"I guarantee you, if we had that and exercised zero tolerance, it would devastate drug traffic in the Tenderloin. And it would clear a sidewalk path for people to go to work and kids to walk to school."

Gang members, squeezed out by heat in the Western Addition, the Mission and Bayview, have come into the TL with dope and guns. TL's homicide rate has jumped. For the first six months of 2007 there were eight homicides compared with five in 2006, according to figures provided at the hearing by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. In answer to a question from Daly, Jimenez said six of the killings this year were gang-related. A possible seventh came Oct. 3 at 4 a.m. when a 17-year-old was shot and killed while standing at Ellis and Larkin.

The TL's gritty reputation is a magnet. Only 3% of suspects arrested here have addresses in the Tenderloin, Jimenez reported at his community police meeting on July 31.

Not all the Public Safety supes were aware of the Tenderloin's worsening conditions.

Supervisor Sophie Maxwell said she went shopping on Market Street and was amazed when she wandered near the demarcation between Fifth and Sixth streets, and found that a dirty curtain drops there and Market Street morphs from spiffy shoppers' territory into a grimy scene of random beggars, duntrodden and shut up storefronts. She was overwhelmed by the smell of stale urine near Sixth Street as tourists

walked nearby.

"How embarrassed I was because it looked and smelled so bad," Maxwell said. "Don't give up. My commitment is to do whatever it takes (to improve the environment)." ■

A tale of 2 cities

L.A., Seattle dealing with filthy streets, too

TENDERLOIN police Capt. Gary Jimenez, at the supervisors' Public Safety Committee hearing, named Seattle and Los Angeles as two cities with programs for dealing with idle populations that are magnets for crime. Both have found ways to put the squeeze on loiterers without actually passing loitering laws, which he told The Extra in his office later, are virtually unconstitutional.

"I don't have a problem with a tired person sitting on the sidewalk — I've done that — but they shoot up and soon you've got an environment that invites that criminal element," he said.

"It's a matter of displacement," he added. "You can't move people out unless there's another place for them to go. Seattle directs them to another part of town. Los Angeles restricts the time a person can be in a certain area." L.A.'s approach is probably the most compatible with San Francisco's politics, he said.

L.A. police Cmdr. Andrew Smith told The Extra his city put 50 more cops in a 50-block downtown area that included a skid row, created a "safe sleep area" there, trimmed trees, picked up trash and added lights.

Crime is down 30% and homicides are down 60%, Smith said. "The central downtown hasn't been safer in our own lifetimes. It's phenomenal improvement."

Sleeping in "the box," as the targeted L.A. area is called, is banned 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Homeless can snooze after that, but if a cop taps someone awake at 6 a.m., the choice is jail or see a social worker with the chance for services and 21 days in a shelter. Either way, the person gets medical screening.

"Homeless advocates say it's mean-spirited," Smith said. "I don't understand them. The proof is in the pudding. People are getting arrested now, not dying."

In Seattle, an ordinance excludes homeless from parks, and a raft of trespass laws — with no appeal — can result in arrest for leaning on a rail or sitting in a parking lot. Seattle has 5,500 homeless and only 2,300 shelter beds, according to the Seattle Displacement Coalition's Web site.

The ACLU is one of a dozen groups protesting Seattle's laws. ACLU also is unhappy with L.A.'s safe sleep area. A recent UCLA study of the initiative found that of the 1,000 people cited each month, few can pay the fines and risk jail time.

"We were promised that in addition to law enforcement we would be seeing more beds and more programs to treat the homeless," said ACLU lawyer Peter Bebring in the Los Angeles Daily News. "Well, there have been no more social programs added and what we are left with is the police function." ■

—TOM CARTER

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