

# Captain's bold solution to Ellis St. encampment

*Turn section of Boeddeker into drug injection site*

BY TOM CARTER

**A**FESTERING problem in the Tenderloin is the havoc on the 300 block of Ellis Street. Every day for years, dispossessed and homeless people line up on the north side of Ellis, awaiting free meals and services at Glide Memorial Methodist Church on the Taylor Street corner. In that line or out, day or night, on both sides of the block, a range of ugly things happen: public drunkenness, urination and defecation; blatant drug using and selling; fighting, foul language. The sidewalk encampments become impassable and many people are fearful of even trying to get by.

The north entrance to Boeddeker Park has been closed for several years because of the problems on Ellis. Residents of Presentation Senior Community next to the park have complained bitterly to the police about late night ruckuses from Glide's parking lot, derelicts hanging around their building entrance or trying to force their way in. Seniors coming to Presentation's health center are especially intimidated by the scene.

Before the election, Mayor Newsom asked the police to clean up the 300 block of Ellis. But no Tenderloin police captain has ever been able to do that. Residents consider TL Capt. Gary Jimenez more responsive to day-to-day complaints than captains before him. Police sweep the block, but only a few hours after, people return.

At the Friends of Boeddeker Park meeting Oct. 1, Jimenez brought up the problem and floated a new idea to the eight people attending.

"Street people," he began, "have no toilets. I talked to Glide about opening their bathrooms to the line and they weren't receptive to that. Many people are waiting for services. And they have a right even to lie on the sidewalk — we shall respect that. They have as much right to the sidewalk as

anyone else.

"But we'd like to give them an alternative space — like the back of this park."

Ears perked up.

Jimenez said he envisioned a screened-off area inside the Ellis Street gate for street people. It would have a couple of porto-potties and needle drops, and resemble Insite, the injection site in Vancouver, British Columbia, established four years ago. At an Oct. 18 drug symposium in the Mission District, the Chronicle reported, the Insite coordinator said it took 10 years to overcome community resistance. But after preventing 800 overdoses, Insite now is backed by the mayor and a majority of the public.

"It would be desanitized on a regular basis," Jimenez said, and paused. "I can imagine it would be used for all kinds of terrible things. Out of sight out of mind."

The Police Department wasn't behind his proposal, he said. He was off on his own with it.

"I propose it," Jimenez said, "but I haven't gotten anywhere with it."

"It would be temporary."

Ed Evans, neighborhood activist for handicapped causes, weighed right in.

"We are trying to preserve it (the park) for people who live here," Evans blurted. "But opening it up to junkies? Would you open up your (police) station to them? A permanent facility is the answer. Or Glide can open up. Either way, we don't want porto-potties in the park. Presentation wouldn't hang you in effigy, they'd do it for real."

The area in question is a few feet from Presentation's rear patio.

Jimenez said he had just cited two people for peeing on the sidewalk.

"The problem on the street is too much for the station," he said. "You need baby-sitters out there. I'm trying to get multiple washdowns (from the Department of Public Works). The problem is 300 Ellis isn't the worst in the Tenderloin but it's getting

worse. I'm sure you are aware of the homicides."

Al Wimberly, Boeddeker Park co-director, said a fenced-in place would create new problems. "And it would put the directors at risk," he said.

But the captain said a screened area would be a place for people to go and service providers could come in to "deal with it," he said.

"Maybe it's a stupid idea," Jimenez conceded.

"It'd be hostile territory," said Steve Cismowski, Rec and Park Neighborhood Services manager for Boeddeker. "Some will say no way that Rec and Park will sign off on it. But it (the problem) is epidemic."

"The city attorney would have to clarify how to navigate that quagmire," he said. "I'd want concrete answers from DPH and the city attorney before Rec and Park could get on board to draft anything."

"My goal would be to have the sidewalks washed five times a day. Every time I come to this park I see the feces and smell the stench."

"I'm just looking for a place for the people," the captain said. "There's nothing. When they leave, they come back. Nobody wants them. It's incumbent on the Tenderloin to find a solution. We can't send them to Treasure Island or the beach. Some are good people just waiting for services. I didn't want to propose it. I didn't like it myself."

"But Glide..." Friends of Boeddeker chair Betty Traynor began.

"No," the captain said, "they won't do it."

"You'd have to have the service people in here to get them off drugs," Evans said.

"The challenge is going to get more complex," said Cismowski. "I don't know that we're making any headway."

The topic was soon dropped and the meeting moved on to the gardening item on the agenda. ■

## Defenestration building faces eminent domain vote

BY TOM CARTER

**T**HE Redevelopment Agency Commission will consider starting eminent domain proceedings in January to buy the gutted and long vacant Hugo Apartments for \$3.25 million after SOMPAC,

its community advisory committee, recommended the move at its November meeting.

Redevelopment has been trying for years to get the owners — the David Patel family — to fix up or sell the blighted four-story building at Sixth and Howard streets. Empty since a 1987 fire, the building has

been famous since the quirky art project called Defenestration went up on its outdoor walls in 1997.

If the commission votes yes on a "resolution of necessity" at the Jan. 15 meeting, the eminent domain ball will start rolling.

It has been well over 25 years since Redevelopment resorted to eminent domain for residential property. The last examples were in the 1960s and '70s urban renewal era involving the Yerba Buena, Western Addition and Golden Gateway projects.

The Patels have spurned bids from buyers, including Redevelopment's fair-market \$3.25 million offer in April, and they have let the Hugo deteriorate and accumulate code violations.

"The (Hugo) fact sheet speaks for itself," said SOMPAC member and neighborhood tenant Ingrid Aquino before the committee voted. "It is almost criminal that it has been going on this long. We need low-cost housing."

The owners were not present.

Two residents in the audience urged eminent domain, Redevelopment's final option to rectify a blighted condition under California Redevelopment law. On the committee there was limited opposition.

William Curry, committee member and neighborhood property owner, said approval would set a "dangerous" precedent for taking "any underutilized property" on Sixth Street, long characterized by vacant storefronts.

"Maybe we could get them to tear it down," Curry said. "Fair market value? What's that? It'll get developed down the road one way or the other. It's a bad day to



PHOTO BY TOM CARTER

**Chairs, couches** and other furniture appear to be flying out of windows at the Hugo Apartments, home of the Defenestration art project, whose fate is up in air.

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