

December chill brings complaints about cold

New, upgraded SROs make solutions easier

BY TOM CARTER

DECEMBER'S temperatures that dipped to the mid-30s sent shivers through the city as complaints about lack of heat by people in apartments, flats and hotels increased from a year ago.

It wasn't San Francisco's worst cold snap in history — 1932's second week in December had four days of bone-numbing 20- to 23-degree weather. And National Weather Service records over 97 years show January is actually San Francisco's coldest month by one degree. January's average low downtown is 51 degrees; December is 52.

Still, December's average was 46.1 degrees, chilly enough that the Department of Building Inspection

got 78 heating complaints, a third more than in 2008 when the average was just a half-degree less. Seven complaints came from Tenderloin and Sixth Street SROs, and at least a dozen more from the neighborhood got handled informally. Data show that more than twice as much of the grousing occurred during the first half of the month, when the snap hit, than in the second half.

Officials say that's not so bad, considering there are 500 SROs in the city — some 100 years old — and because DBI handles most problems swiftly. SRO renovations and new construction by nonprofits have improved conditions, too.

"Buildings are better built, and with Title 24 energy requirements more strict, newer buildings have fewer heat issues than older ones," says Rosemary Bosque, chief housing inspector.

"But these (heat) figures aren't unusual," says Bosque, who has worked in code enforcement 24 years and is a member of the Health Department's SRO Hotel Safety & Stabilization Task Force.

"Usually complaints are corrected very quickly," Bosque says. "They range from radiators, valves, timings not set right, thermostats, central heating and boilers. Most (heating systems) are time clocks that can be adjusted right then and there."

Heating isn't the pressing problem for SRO residents that bedbugs are, or leaky roofs in heavy rain, but a cold room means suffering when you shouldn't.

S.F. Housing Code Section 701 says apartment and hotel room heat must be at least 68 degrees for 13 hours daily — from 5 a.m. to 11 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.

When DBI gets a complaint, it sends out an inspector. If the prob-

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

NO. 97

PUBLISHED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO STUDY CENTER

FEBRUARY 2010



HISTORIC TL MAP IN THE MAKING

Author-photog hired to handle project

PAGE 2

VALUE, AGE OF MID-MARKET

All 57 buildings 8th St. to 5th

PAGE 5



TENDERLOIN OBITUARIES

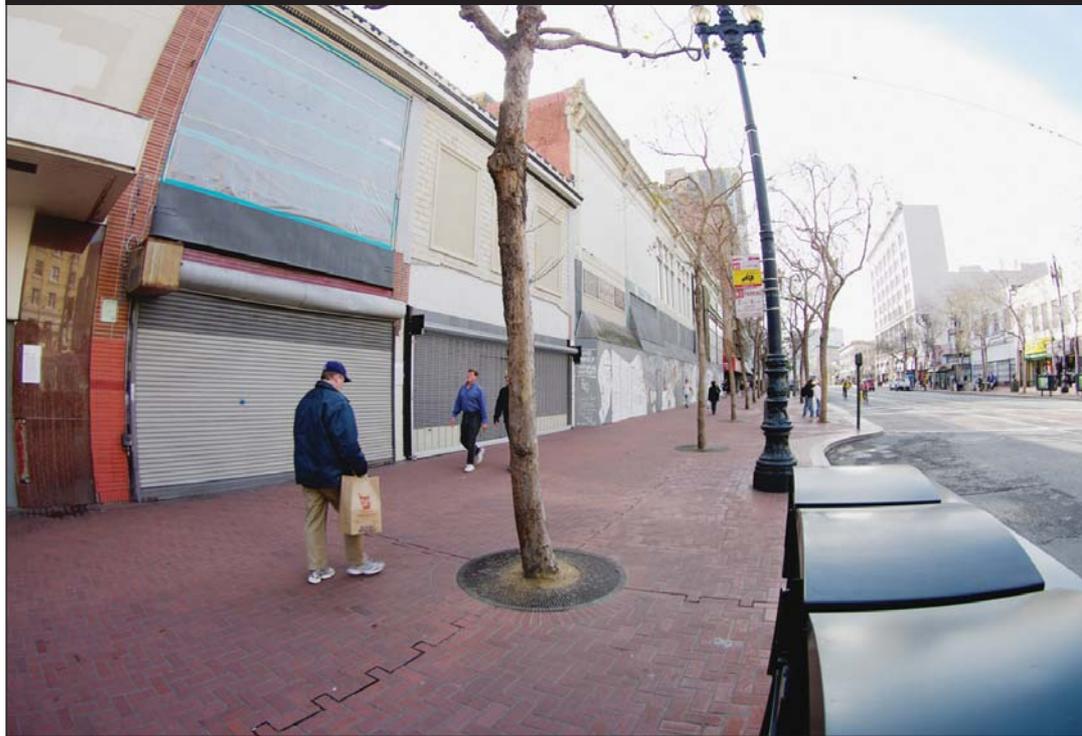
PAGE 6

CENTRAL CITY

EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

8TH STREET TO 5TH



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Despite assessed values in excess of \$375 million on these three blocks, the CityPlace parcels, above, reflect the area's persistent bleakness.

MID-MARKET

The shape it's in. Who owns it. What's next.

BY MARJORIE BEGGS, JONATHAN NEWMAN AND GEOFF LINK

WE call it the plywood parade — the relentless march up Market Street from Fifth to Eighth of boarded-up or erratically open storefronts, emptying offices in the upper stories and crumbling facades.

The three mid-Market blocks mostly look like hell.

The mayor knew that when he announced his Jan. 14 launch of a Central Market Partnership "to renew and coordi-

nate efforts" to fix up the area. His project extends from Fifth Street to Van Ness. Our look is tighter because Fifth to Eighth is the locus of the deteriorating retail scene. Owners have renovated a few of the 57 buildings along the three blocks, only to find the ground floors unrentable.

Of the 88 storefronts in these buildings, 27 — 31% — are vacant today.

Among the 27 empty storefronts on the three blocks are ones that make a big impression: Civic Center Pharmacy, the Grant Building ground floor, Merrill's Drugstore, Hollywood Billiards and the planned CityPlace complex.

Early last year, the owner of the Wilson Building next door to Pearl's was planning to convert the upper floors to residential condos, but work stopped in the midst of façade renovation. The building has had six liens against it in the last 18 months and is considered "troubled" by Fidelity National Title, which is involved in trying to move the property.

The recession may have pushed mid-Market over the edge to today's grim visage, but its decay was sealed at least 20 years ago.

Market Street was jumpin' in the 1970s. There were lots of people on the street, plenty of things to do. The St. Francis, Embassy and Strand theaters were operating, Merrill's was bustling, Hibernia Bank was opening new accounts. People came and went around here with great regularity — to an amusement arcade, the Market Street Cinema and, just off Market and

➤ CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



Pearl is getting ready to close its doors for good in February.