Fire chief agrees to tone down

Reaffirms her '05 order to limit loud air horns

BY TOM CARTER

REINSTATING their three-year campaign to reduce noise pollution from fire trucks, the slow-burning residents of the Tenderloin got yet another promise from the fire chief that she would tone it down a notch.

Fire Chief Joanne Hayes-White tactily agreed at a public meeting in March to enforce her general order of October 2005 to abate noise; her response then to public griping over ear-splitting air horns and sirens. Now, 2½ years later, she’s responding to the same old complaint.

The chief said the department wanted to be a good neighbor, but didn’t specifically say she would reemphasize that order.

But two weeks after the March 20 meeting, Hayes-White said Deputy Chief Richard Kochovar had “reiterated” the order to the department. So Battalion 3, the 1067 Post St. station that is the main focus of complaints, got the message. The station sends its response vehicles through the Tenderloin down Hyde Street. Last year its siren engine answered 7,439 calls, more than any station in the country.

In a phone interview April 2, Hayes-White told The Extra she knew the original order had been effective because complaints dropped. “We figured no news was good news,” she said.

But noise complaints started picking up again late last year, despite reminders at battalion counseling sessions to tone down. She said no personnel had been reported internally for excess siren noise, an infraction that could lead to discipline.

The order, with her emphasis in boldface, acknowledges that “excessive use of apparatus air horns has adversely impacted members of the public... Until further notice, air horns are not to be used as a primary response warning signal.”

Hayes-White showed up in the Tenderloin with seven department officers at the Community Leadership Alliance meeting in the Antonia Manor called to find solutions to Fire Department noise, according to CLA announcements. The chief had attended the February meeting of the Lower Polk Neighbors when it addressed the same issue.

“Many of you are becoming familiar faces,” the chief said, scanning the crowd of 50.

CLA Director David Villa-Lobos, Deputy Chief Richard Kochevar had 20 meeting, Hayes-White said didn’t specifically say she would reiterate the order.

Robertta Goodman (right) shops at the Food Bank for Empress residents.
T HIS following letter is a response to Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi’s recent proposal to harass community newspapers that are interested in the Board of Supervisors on March 18. Within 30 days, it goes to the City Operations and Neighborhood Services Committee at City Hall. Please, the letter’s author, not only helped form the San Francisco Neighborhood Paper Association, of which the Central City Extra is a member. His Sunset and Richmond district newspaper helps assure all of us credibility for professionalism, often hard-fighting neighborhood newspaper industry.

EDITOR: Another lane-brained supervisor with nothing better to do than propose a solution for a nonexistent problem. Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi last month proposed a $100 to $500 penalty for every instance a newspaper is delivered to a home on a newly created “do not deliver” list. Yet, in the years newspapers have existed in the Richmond and Sunset districts for almost 20 years. Only recently have they created a do-to-door-to-monthly, I have seven people on my “do not deliver” list. That’s ‘heads’ in the building a copy of the newspaper. It usually works, but sometimes a new “walker” will accidentally deliver to a home that does not want the paper. I usually fine $100 to $500 every time this happens, even though I have no control over the process. I do not deliver calling do-to-door to the local paper.

Many of the “walkers” my service users are from South and Latin American countries and do not speak English. They are humping their butts off here doing menial work to support families back home. Are we going to fine them, or their employ- er, for an honest mistake? Will they be fired or retaliated against? Are publishers to be held responsible for the actions of a subcontractor, even though we have no direct supervision over the delivery service’s employees?

As well, I’ve had apartment man- agers who do not want the paper delivered to their buildings because they didn’t want to pick up the extra copies. They would deny every ten- ant in the building a copy of the neighborhood newspaper because of their own personal reasons. Do I deny 30 families a community news- paper because one does not want it? In the Tenderloin, there, and the 18th neighborhood news- papers that comprise the San Fran- cisco Neighborhood Newspaper Asso- ciation (SFNNA) have a stake in the outcome of the proposed legislation, yet we were not consulted beforehand this Draconian measure was introduced. It’s hard enough for pub- lications to serve their communities without the supervisors giving a ham- mer to anyone who has an ax to grind with their neighborhood newspaper.

I say kill this misguided legisla- tion before it takes one thin dime from one city’s budget to hire more lawyers or create a new bureaucracy at City Hall.

By Marjorie Beggs

IT’S been more than five years since St. Anthony Foundation announced it would raze 121 Golden Gate Ave., the former Knights of Columbus buildings which it bought in 1999, and put new administrative digs on the site. The five-story building opened in mid-May, Daniel O’Connor, St. Anthony’s community liaison, told the Tenderloin Futures Collabora- tive in March.

All St. Anthony’s offices and services that served 121 Golden Gate Ave. except the dining room and clinic — will move across the street to the new building. But it will be far dif- ferent from what was proposed just a couple of years ago.

As plans for both buildings were gestating, 121 was going to be three stories: food prep in the basement, dining room on the first floor, 17 units of permanent senior housing on the second and 17 respite units for people just discharged from the hospital on the third.

At the Collaborative meeting, O’Connor introduced Sharon Christen, housing developer with Tenderloin Futures Collabora- tive, in mid-May, Daniel O’Connor, St. Anthony’s community liaison, told the Tenderloin Futures Collabora- tive in March. St. Anthony’s free medical clinic, which, as they evaporate, con- centrate to 150 Golden Gate. The dining room, which serves 2,000 meals a day, will move there tem- porarily so while 121 is under con- struction.

Before it’s even opened, the new building at 150 has some envi- ronmental bona fides, according to Aviani.

We believe 150 Golden Gate will be the first LEED-certified green direct service social services building in San Francisco,” she said.

LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — is the rating system of the U.S. Green Building Council, a nonprofit that encourages energy efficiency and responsible use of natural resources.

“...This was important to the foundation,” Aviani said, “both in terms of our Franciscan approach to environmental sustainability, and our understanding of the role that environment plays in the health of the community. Almost 95% of the demolition waste was recycled, and much of the concrete and steel in the building contains recycled materi- als: An evaporative cooling sys- tem on the rooftop and other effi- ciencies will reduce annual ener- gy use by 50%. Water use will be cut 20% by low-flow and low- flush plumbing fixtures. And car- paint, and adhesives in the building contain compounds that emit only low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as benzene and formaldehyde, which, as they evaporate, con- tribute to smog and may harm people with allergies.

Green is likely to be a consider- ation for 121 as well. Meanwhile, Mercy and St. Anthony want to know what TL residents think of the new design for 121. Put in your 20 and more at a community meeting, April 8-6, p.m. in St. Anthony’s Powereller Room, 109 Golden Gate. ■
Community benefit district cleans, patrols Central Market

BY SONYA SVOBODA

Central Market Community Benefit District began providing services in February, more than a year after the CBD was formed.

The CBDS have the same street sweeper service, the Clean City Coalition, which hires low-income and homeless people. Clean City, however, contracts with a two-person team to clean Central Market streets during the week and has a separate contract with MJM Management Group to clean on weekends. MJM Management also contracts with the CBD to provide its Community Guides, a pair of brown-uniformed, police-trained men who patrol Central Market streets from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays.

The guides are CBD’s response to its survey last spring of property owners’ concerns, said Daniel Hurtado, executive director of the Central Market CBD. The respondents’ chief complaints, he said, were alcohol and aggressive panhandling, along with urine and feces on the streets. So, the Guides patrol the area, armed with a list of social services to refer miscreants to for help.

They also have been trained on how to recognize criminal behavior and activities that warrant contacting the police,” said Hurtado. “It’s a different attitude in the Tenderloin.

“The area is definitely better than before, but the police need to do more work during business hours,” said an employee of Oxford Street Men’s Clothing & Accessories, located on Market between Fifth and Sixth streets. “Right outside are the homeless and people selling dope.”

He said he’d never heard of the CBD.

At Café 36 on Fifth Street, employee Cony Judah agrees the streets are cleaner. “But homelessness hasn’t improved — it will take more than the Central CBD.”

Help Us Transform Your Muni System

TEP preliminary proposals aim to transform Muni into a first-rate transit system to reduce congestion, decrease pollution and get people where they want to go efficiently, safely. Proposals range from more service on the busiest routes to eliminating routes with the fewest customers. You can help shape these proposals to improve Muni — come to a community meeting and share your feedback.

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BY SONYA SVOBODA

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Sat., April 19th at 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
West Portal Elementary, 5 Lenex Way at Taraval St. Wheelchair access through Claremont St. school yard. Nearby Muni routes: 17, 48, K, L & M to West Portal Station

Sat., April 26th at 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Dianne Feinstein Elementary, 2550 25th Ave. at Vicente St. Nearby Muni routes: L, 28 & 66

Mon., April 28th at 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.
Southeast Community Facility, 1000 Oakdale Ave. at Phelp St. Nearby Muni routes: T, 23, 24, 44 & 54

Wed., April 30 at 6 p.m.-8 p.m.
City College Mission Campus, 1125 Valencia St. at 22nd St. Nearby Muni routes: 14, 26, 48, 49 & 67

Mon., May 5 at 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.
Visitacion Valley Elementary, 55 Swartz St. at Visitacion Ave. Nearby Muni routes: 9K, 9B, K & 68

Sat., May 10 at 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Harvey Milk Civil Rights Academy, 4235 19th St. at Diamond St. Nearby Muni routes: F, K, L, M, 24, 33 & 36

Mon., May 12 at 6 p.m.-8 p.m.
West Bay Conference Center, 1290 Fillmore St. at Eddy St. Nearby Muni routes: 5, 22, 31 & 38

Wed., May 14 at 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m.
Bessie Carmichael Elementary, 375 Seventh St. at Harrison St. Nearby Muni routes: 9K, 12, 14X, 19 & 47

Sat., May 17th at 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Mission YMCA, 4080 Mission Street at 24th St. Nearby Muni routes: 14, 23 & 49

For more information, go online www.sftp.com or call 311

All sites are wheelchair accessible. Materials in large print will be available at the meeting. To request assistive listening devices, a sign language interpreter or other accommodations, please call 415-252-1555, TTY 415-252-3223. Providing at least 12 hours’ notice is essential (415) 252-3628. 

Interpretation in Caronwese and Spanish will be provided. There will be a food/beverage offering at each meeting.

A P R I L 2 0 0 8 / C E N T R A L C I T Y E X T R A

3
Goodman and a volunteer place items on covered tables and arrange them in an appetizing fashion.

Empress General Manager Roberta Goodman lugs a case of organic food from the Food Bank delivery volunteer, such as the one next to her, to the delivery table inside to the community room, where residents take the food.

Oversees 18 supportive housing pantries in the Tenderloin and 50 in all, including SoMa. Almost half of the TL’s 36,000 population “live with the daily threat of hunger,” according to a 2007 Food Bank survey. In such a frail population, hunger worsens chronic health problems and speeds the onset of disease.

“The Empress has good food and it’s beautiful and dignified — set up in a farmers’ market style,” says Sverdlov. “There are some other programs that are close to it, but it’s the best and my model.”

At less than half of Sverdlov’s pantry drops shoppers help specify the items, something she wants to change. Selections made at the warehouse based on residents’ requests avoid the waste when pantries contain only whatever items the Food Bank has on hand.

“I’m assessing the Tenderloin’s needs now,” Sverdlov says, “and I want to add three to five pantries. But we’re only opening pantries that will shop.”

Each week, Empress Hotel General Manager Roberta Goodman takes the T-line to Third Street, gets off and walks a few blocks to the Food Bank. It’s the poor man’s Costco, a sprawling warehouse with a 60-foot ceiling at 900 Pennsylvania Ave. in Dogpatch, hard by Interstate 280.

She grabs a flatbed cart for her typical Wednesday morning shopping spree and wheels it sharply to the left, down an uncrowded corridor, past stacks of boxed and canned food to the bread bin on the east wall. But at 9:45 a.m. she’s running a little late and the bin is practically empty.

“Luck of the draw,” Goodman says, arching an eyebrow and selecting a dozen loaves while eyeing the pita bread. “But it’s always an adventure here.

“Some people want the white bread,” she adds, “but pita is always popular. Maybe more bread will show up before we leave.

“I pick a combination of healthy (foods) and what people like. I have one person who can’t do any soy, and just about everything has it. Some are lactose intolerant and I’m careful about sugar for the diabetics.”

Ever since she and resident Robert Abate collaborated on the Empress’ food giveaway a year ago, Goodman has spent an hour each week shopping at the Food Bank. Part of her mission is to get the hotel’s 82 formerly homeless folks up and running and leading active lives. She works for Delivering Innovation in Supportive Housing (DISH), under contract with the Department of Public Health.

Residents recall November 2005, when Prince Charles and his then-bride, the Duchess of Cornwall, visited the Empress, hand-picked for them as a shining example of Mayor Newsom’s Housing First program. Charles was intrigued by conversations with the formerly homeless residents, and the SRO got its 15 minutes of international fame.

“We had to ask people in the hotel what they needed most,” shopper Goodman says, as she moves on to the Food Bank’s protein bars. ‘Food was high on the list. So we’ve tried to create a regular institutional program that supports them. It was a success from the first day.’

San Francisco has the highest priced groceries in the nation and the Tenderloin has the lowest per capita income in the city. No supermarkets exist in the TL, and pricey mom-and-pops, top-heavy with snacks, eat right through a wallet.

Goodman swings open a massive steel door to find a cavernous refrigerator practically empty. Sverdlov says the Food Bank seldom if ever gets meat donations, and across the board, donations are down, she says. ‘Short-coded’ items with expiration dates and dented cans are increasingly going to secondary markets like FoodsCo and dollar stores, she says. The Food Bank does receive short-coded donated items and will distribute food beyond their expiration dates, based on guidelines set by the Food Marketing Institute.

“Last week, I was lucky and found some salmon,” Goodman says. “Usually there’s cheese and cottage cheese and yogurt and milk in here.”

There are considerations. Not everyone has teeth, and some won’t eat certain products. Such “customized” shopping made the program a hit from day one, she says.

Her choices are also weight sensitive. The Food Bank charges 18 cents a pound for everything but bread, which is 4 cents a pound. She avoids many canned items. But once she determines a theme for the day — a key item like tostada shells — she selects supporting items that make it easy to build a meal. Canned diced tomatoes, chiles and chilli beans go onto the cart. She did pasta last week.

The next day, when the Food Bank delivers the order to the Empress, it will heap on free bonus bread and fruits and vegetables, usually stuff that perishes quickly like lettuce and bananas and always potatoes and onions. But you never know what will arrive.

Goodman buys by the case, expecting a turnover of up to 60, an impressive 75% of the Empress’ residents. She sets quantity limits per resident to keep the shopping fair.

On her cart’s growing stack go 48 protein bars in two cases, eight-to-a-box Krunchers chips, mini Triskets and Tamara sauce — last...
model for healthier eating in SROs

The Food Bank, according to its Website, delivers to 25 SROs including the Empress. It’s the only one Elk, Empress and Mentone/Coronado (one delivery) hotels are the newest additions.

PANTRIES SERVING NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS
Southeast Asian Community Center Tendoloin Self Help Center Turk Street Corps, Salvation Army

PANTRIES SERVING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN
Carran House Tendoloin Elementary School

PANTRIES SERVING SENIORS
Alexander Residence Antonia Manor* Boeddeker Recreation Center Dorothy Day Community* Eastern Park Apartments* Maria Manor Marlon Manor St. Anthony Foundation Vietnamese Elderly Mutual Assistance

PANTRIES SERVING ADULTS IN SUPPORTIVE HOUSING
111 Jones Street Apartments Ambassador Hotel Aranda Hotel Cadillac Hotel Cave Center Residence Dak Hotel Elk Hotel Empire Hotel Francisca Tovers Glide Community Housing Inc. Indo-Chinese Housing Hartland Hotel Boeddeker Recreation Center Maria Manor Mentone, Coronado hotels Pacific Bay Inn Plaza & Ramon Apartments Ritz Hotel Sierra Madre & Klimn Apartments Tendoloin Housing Clinic — Harlan Hotel The West Hotel

PUBLIC MEAL PROGRAMS
Glide Community Food Program St. Anthony Dining Room*
are Care Not Cash hotels. Some have community kitchens, others just microwaves in individual rooms. DHS had four hotels on the pantry delivery route and increased its contract with the Food Bank to add six more, plus Abate’s shopping job to cover the 10. But SRO space varies and some markets are no bigger than a walk-in closet.

“We really get a lot of bang for our buck,” says DHS Housing and Homeless Deputy Director Scott Walton. “For every $1 of ours, we get $8 in food. The pantries get set up like little farmers’ markets. And the program helps build community in the buildings.”

The Empress is in the Department of Public Health master lease program for housing.

Abate says the lure of food is a socializing influence. It brings people together who tend to isolate themselves. They mingle and talk, though some seem unable to partake.

“They only come to the door and turn back,” Abate says. “But you see social growth here and when they volunteer it might be the beginning of them getting out of here, like leaving the nest.”

The volunteers get to shop first at 1:45 p.m., they fill their bags and leave. The rest start at 2 p.m. They enter about one per minute into a room that now has the visual flair of Whole Foods and the friendliness of Trader Joe’s.

Goodman checks off names on a roster to keep a count and doesn’t let the room get crowded. The bread is gone by 2:15 when hip-hop and soul singer Mary J. Blige’s voice fills the room from a CD player in the corner.

A few announce they are shopping for other residents and that’s okay. There’s a loud argument outside the door over who comes in first. Goodman steps outside and quells it and the process resumes.

The residents usually comment gleefully on what surprises them, the peanut crunch bars, the size of the potatoes in the red wagon, the Shrek gummies. The experience is like looking under a Christmas tree.

At the end of the marketing day, 61 of the hotel’s 82 residents had shopped. Everything was gone, except a few boxed items that would be recycled the next week. In the unlikely event they are continually ignored, they end up in Goodman’s Halloween basket.

“What I’m glad about is that the two new residents from last week came down and another person I hadn’t seen in a long time,” says Goodman. ■
Big noise can mean hairy hearing losses

A n engine siren at 123 decibels hurts most people’s ears and can cause hearing loss. Noise levels at concerts, where the volume often exceeds 110 decibels, can damage your ears in 10 seconds, according to the University of Michigan Health System Web site. (See sidebar.)

In the future, the officials indicated, it may be possible to synchronize stop lights to automatically change to favor the path of response vehicles. In February, Hayes-White sent a letter to the Polk Street Neighbors saying she was willing to analyze any Department of Parking and Traffic study for such a plan.

“It might be confusing to the public, though,” the chief explained. “We asked the department to tone down central city sirens.

But the committee never met. Michael Nulty, then the Alliance co-president and a committee member, said no one stepped forward to be chair. Pedersen also served on the committee.

“The committee formed a Sirens in SF message board,” Nulty said. “It’s only accessed by its (150) members, though.

Sirens in the Tenderloin remain an issue as long as people say they are suffering. A Chronicle story that appeared on SFGate March 26 on the topic drew 260 e-mail responses and three more the next day.

“People are opposed to that,” answered the chief. “It’s a fire, an ambulance can’t stop it.”

“But it’s such a small chance,” he said.

“We could argue it,” she said. “But at the end of the day we look at what our role is. And yes, there are many false alarms from call boxes. Pull the hook and we get notified.”

Erica Byrne, a Leavenworth Street resident who works on Market Street, puzzled the department’s remaining panel by showing that under the California Vehicle Code a vehicle responding to an emergency doesn’t have to sound a siren.

“Are you aware that using the siren isn’t required?” she asked the panel, then walked up front to show them a copy of the code section that spells it out. Byrne taught vehicle laws and regulations for six years at the South Zone Fire Engine Academy.

It’s a common mistake to think that sounding a siren is required, she said. After the meeting, Byrne said she was disappointed in the department’s lack of willingness to give credible responses to questions about health.

Many of the topics were discussed at length June 14, 2005, when 70 people attended an Alliance for a Better District Six forum on sirens. It was suggested then that a study be conducted to examine the effects of sirens on people. A 19-member Siren Abatement Committee was formed.

At a subsequent Alliance meeting, a representative of Supervisor Daly’s office attended and said the supervisor was willing to listen to the predicament but needed data to work from, and then he could meet with the committee.

Police room to reopen after asbestos problem

T he Tenderloin Police Station Community Room, closed since November because of floor damage, is expected to be available for meetings by April 29 when the captain’s forum on food safety is scheduled. Capt. Gary Jimenez announced in March.

The protracted problem originated with a roof leak that needed to be fixed. The leak got into the floor. Upon inspection it was found that the flat roof wasn’t to blame; it was a chipped drainpipe that had to be fixed. Meanwhile, a crack in what the captain called the cheap concrete floor below had been fed by the lack of floor swelling and buckled.

Nothing was done about it for weeks because of budget shortages, the department was told. Then Chief Heather Feng talked to Mayor Newsom, who promised $20,000 available. Jimenez said.

Workers came to fix the floor but discovered asbestos underneath.

“The guys walked off the job,” Jimenez said. “We’re at the mercy of a bunch of contractors.”

The captain assigned Officer Leo Kiang to monitor the renovation. Kiang said he called everyone involved with the project twice a day at the Department of Building Inspection and the Department of Public Works.

In February he said there was “no end in sight.”

Finally, a concrete contractor was given the job to “encapsulate” the asbestos, which meant putting down another floor but using a higher grade of concrete. He missed his scheduled date but days later completed the job.

“We now await the tile contractor to arrive and lay a new floor,” Jimenez said. His troubles then at his March 25 meeting held at 111 Jones St. “We hope it’ll be ready for the April meeting.”

Fire chief to tone down central city sirens

B ecause of the pounding that people’s ears get from wailing sirens along the emergency response route of Station 3’s fire engine, the nation’s leader with more than 7,400 trips last year — the Tenderloin is a ripe study ground for the World Health Organization.

The WHO, which released starting new evidence last year on the effects of noise pollution, looks for households with abnormally high exposure to noise. Then it compares their death and disease rates to rates in quiet neighborhoods.

Last year’s study, prompted by a swell of complaints, suggested that the long-term exposure to mere traffic noise could account for 3% of deaths from heart attack in Europe. Worldwide, 7 million die annually of heart disease. So, 210,000 were “dying for some quiet,” according to an article on the study in New Scientist magazine in August.

And European cities don’t use the high-powered sirens that San Francisco does.

“Until now,” the article says, quoting a London audiology professor who worked on the study, “noise has been the Cinderella form of pollution and people haven’t been aware that it has an impact on their health.”

Also quoted was EPA spokesman John Millet.

“We’ve always acknowledged that noise can exacerbate health problems. With noise, there’s a lot of damage to hearing,” Millet said. “It causes a wider array of health issues including cardiovascular impacts, blood pressure, even heart attacks to those who were susceptible.”

But the agency’s Office of Noise and Abatement and Control was discontinued in the early 1980s to hand off the problem to local governments.

—TOM CARTER

Study shows noise can rank

The experts at the table had no response and asked if the noise was causing damage to their hearing.

He and a young woman sitting in the back row turned to Hayes-White and asked if the noise was causing damage to their hearing.

A white-haired man in the front row grew impatient.

“Ours have about 123 decibels,” he said. “The horn noise.

An ambulance siren at 10 feet is 120 decibels. As noise exposure is repeated,” the Noise and Hearing magazine in August. And European cities don’t use the high-powered sirens that San Francisco does.

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Office of Self Help

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