

TL forum survives close call

West SoMa counterpart quietly packs it in

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

Twenty-five people attended the July Tenderloin Futures Collaborative meeting — the biggest turnout in a year. That same month, over on the other side of Market Street, the Collaborative's counterpart SoMa Leadership Council canceled its meeting and announced "a hiatus" that now appears permanent.

"There just aren't enough activists in SoMa to go around," Jim Meko, Council founder and District 6 supervisory candidate, told The Extra.

The collaborative, too, almost folded. Despite a full agenda and two dozen people at the August meeting, the collaborative's temporary coordinator was stepping down with no replacement in sight to do the work of recruiting presenters, preparing agendas and sending out meeting notices.

Michael Nulty, neighborhood activist and president of Alliance for a Better District 6, had filled in for six months after TNDC's Steven Woo left the voluntary position. Both cited too much of their own work to do this, too.

Fifteen people showed up for the Collaborative's September meeting, but there were only two agenda items: Bay Drug, the proposed pharmacy at 281 Turk St., and a discussion of the collaborative's future.

In August, the group had heard from Shaughn Morgan, manager of three Tenderloin apartment buildings who is spearheading the opposition to the new drugstore. She came back in September and was part of the lively discussion with Mike Djordjevich, a CPA who, with pharmacist Guy Forte, co-owns Bay Drug. The two also own a pharmacy in Seattle that specializes, they say, in serving people with HIV/AIDS.

PILL CENTRAL

Morgan contends that the block of Turk Street between Jones and Leavenworth is already pill central for illegal drug sales, theft and long lines of people waiting at "the five other places on the block that dispense pills."

(Later, Morgan clarified that she meant the square block, though her list of five medicine outlets is actually farther away than that: Curry Senior Center at 345 Turk and, on the 100 block of Golden Gate Avenue, Tenderloin Outpatient Clinic/SF Recovery, St. Anthony Free Medical Clinic, Tenderloin Health and MOMS Pharmacy.)

"Bay Drug is a community pharmacy, not a pill dispensary," Djordjevich countered. "We'll be responsible neighbors, open during regular work hours, with a guard outside. We're hiring the best and the brightest clinical staff." Unlike the Seattle business, this is a general pharmacy, he said. It will cater to the area's many seniors by offering deliveries, a private consultation room, and pill packages that are easy to open and encourage accurate pill-taking. Also, pharmacists will be dispatched to neighborhood clinics for consultations.

"Pharmacies, no matter how legitimate, can't control what happens outside their doors," Morgan insisted. "When you decided on this location, were you aware that this is THE spot where people buy illegal drugs?"

Djordjevich said what they knew was "that the neighborhood needs services. The decision wasn't made lightly."

He told The Extra that he and his partner spent a year and a half looking for the right spot. Three leases in various Tenderloin locations and even a negotiation to buy a building, at 125 Hyde, didn't pan out.

"We knew the Tenderloin was the right place because of all the seniors and the huge HIV presence," Djordjevich said. "Especially for those with HIV/AIDS, the neighborhood dispensary [MOMS] does cattle-herding — there's no privacy there, no dignity, no consultation rooms."

Morgan has no animus against the owners of Bay Drug, she said: "It's not personal — it's just the location."

She has filed an appeal challenging Bay Drug's building permit that the Board of Appeals will hear Oct. 6. What touched off her appeal was watching construction of the space in mid-April. "They said they had a building permit, but when I went to

check for it, there was none," she said. "It was a big fib. When the permit was issued, it was dated mid-May. That's illegal."

Morgan thinks her appeal has a 50-50 chance of success. Djordjevich is "confident" the appeal will fail.

Bay Drug's buildout is complete. If the appeal fails, the owners will immediately begin negotiating a Medi-Cal contract for reimbursements and prepare for opening early in 2011, Djordjevich said.

Collaborative Chair Glenda Hope closed the discussion and thanked Morgan and Djordjevich for their civility.

COLLABORATIVE HISTORY

"So, does the community want this collaborative to continue?" she asked. "Should we hold a funeral for it?"

Turns out it was a rhetorical question. That morning, Susie Wong, director of operations and development at S.F. Network Ministries, told Hope, her boss, that she'd be interested in trying her hand at coordinating the collaborative. Hope gave her blessing.

Many at the meeting gave the collaborative high marks as a forum that keeps people informed.

YMCA Communications Director Jon Owens called the meetings "a good place to have open communications."

"I like the concept and find it useful," said Father Tom West, St. Anthony Foundation's new community liaison.

"I find it useful, too," echoed Morgan. "Until recently, I didn't even know that the collaborative existed."

"This is the only organization meeting in the Tenderloin that is broad-based, inclusive, and allows presentations on many issues, not just a single interest or focus," said Nulty, whose history with neighborhood groups goes back to the collaborative's founding and long before that.

The collaborative began meeting in September 2001, picking up some of the loose strings left when the Lower

Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force disbanded. Formed in 1991 as a coalition of neighbors, businesses, community organizations and civic leaders, the task force was staffed by housing specialist Brad Paul and had an enviable budget — during its last two years it operated with \$1 million in grants from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund and the city Hotel Tax Fund.

Its members were vocal activists, often with conflicting agendas, pushing for economic development, affordable housing, support services for needy residents, space for nonprofits and other neighborhood improvements.

When the Goldman grant dried up in 2001, many members, Nulty and Hope among them, didn't want to lose years' worth of community organizing. They conceived the idea of the collaborative — at first called the Futures Committee — as an information-sharing venue, not a membership organization. There was no money and no staff to run it. From the start, Hope chaired meetings, and over the years, TNDC rotated its own staff in and out of the coordinator position.

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Michael Nulty
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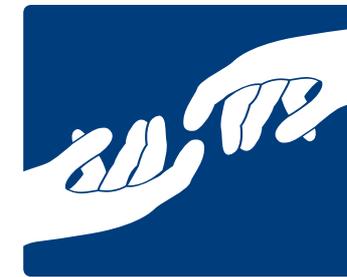
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