

Tax-break committee regroups

Postpones review of long-awaited reports of benefits

By MARK HEDIN AND GEOFF LINK

THE NEWLY reconstituted Citizens Advisory Committee — the central city communities' connection to the largesse from the Twitter tax-break firms — met in mid-July for the first time after being out of action for 3½ months.

The city attorney's office was there to give the members a lesson in the strict do's and don'ts of their committee work, pointing out potential problem areas like the procedural technicality that put the CAC out of commission in early April.

The resuscitated panel, preoccupied with procedural matters, put off dealing with the tax-break companies' first quarterly reports, which were all in hand, but the committee decided not to discuss them.

Nine days before the meeting, on July 9, the Board of Supervisors rubber-stamped its Rules Committee's nominations for the CAC — reinstating Steve Suzuki and Brad Paul and seating Peter Masiak, Julian Dash, Jeff Kositsky, Antoinetta Stadlman and Stephen Tennis.

The eight members present elected Seat 2 newcomer Masiak to be chairman and set the committee's next meeting, date: Sept. 5. Dash was nominated vice chair, but Masiak, the rookie, said having two newcomers as officers was not a good idea. The panel agreed and moved on.

Vice Chair Mara Blitzer led the meeting. A key item on the agenda was to finally review the first-quarter reports on the benefits the firms had agreed to provide.

"These are the first written reports that we've received, so it's really exciting," Blitzer said. "But I'd like to make a comment: There's no possible way we can have a discussion on the quarterly reports when we just got the reports at this meeting."

Tim Ho, recently hired by the city administrator to coordinate with the CAC, was making his first appearance at an official CAC meeting. He begged to differ. He said he had emailed the reports within the 72-hour notification rule, a point Kositsky confirmed after the meeting. Nonetheless, reviewing the six companies' reports of benefits contributed from February through April will wait until the September meeting.

The city attorney's office — whose interpretation of the rules triggered the decimation of the CAC over some members' unexcused absences — sent Joshua White and Marie Blits to brief the committee on some particularly stringent regulations, such as the Sunshine Ordinance mandating that all activities or contact involving a majority of the committee be done in public. Blits later clarified that even an email from one member to the rest of the group is forbidden.

The group also operates under super-strict conflict-of-interest rules. White said that panel members cannot serve if

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INCENTIVES TO CHANGE



PHOTO BY BRIAN RINKER

Irfan Ali, who has owned Cadillac Market for six years, hadn't heard of the city's fresh food program, but doesn't think it will pay off in his store at the rough corner of Eddy and Hyde.

Fresh, but not easy

City puts up \$60,000 for healthy fare in TL mom-and-pops

By MARJORIE BEGGS

BY YEAR'S END, the Tenderloin will have one model corner store that highlights inexpensive, healthy food instead of tobacco, alcohol and snacks high in salt, fat and sugar. A year from now, up to three more stores will join the transformative program.

Each participating store will get \$16,000 worth of technical assistance and tangible products like display cases and coolers. Of the total, \$12,000 is an outright grant and \$4,000 a loan at 3% interest that may be forgiven if the merchant meets program criteria for three years.

It's taken a while to get the Healthy Food Retailer Incentives Program going. Almost a year ago, Supervisor Eric Mar introduced it, but the legislation languished. City elections were imminent and Mar and his staff hadn't the time to muster support, says his aide Nick Pagonlatos.

A critical part of that support came from the 450-member Arab American Grocers Association. "We had some issues at first, but we worked them out," President Kamel Karajah said. "Look, it's a voluntary program. It's not like we have to [join]. If a store owner believes some of the help the city can give will improve his business, he's free to take it."

The Land Use Committee finally heard the ordinance July 22 and took public testimony, all overwhelmingly supportive. With no opposition, committee members sent the legislation on to the full board.

The Tenderloin, which still has no full-service grocery, often is portrayed as an arid food wasteland. "It's a food desert," said Stephen Tennis, a TL activist working on the model corner store effort.

The reality is that the Tenderloin has ready access to affordable fresh produce in one of the city's largest outlets, the three-times-a-week Heart of the City Farmers Market. Also, the neighborhood has almost three dozen food pantries serving thousands of residents with fresh produce and other healthy foods supplied by the San Francisco Food Bank.

What the Tenderloin lacks, however, is what San Franciscans in most other neighborhoods take for granted: They can walk a block or two to a corner store and pick up some fresh food for a snack or quick meal filler.

The TL has 70 corner stores, according to a recent survey by the 10-member Tenderloin Healthy Corner Store Coalition. While all but eight sell alcohol and cigarettes, more than half carry no fresh produce.

Certainly, the availability of alcohol in the neighborhood is ubiquitous — a representative of Southern Wine and Spirits, the nation's largest liquor wholesaler, calls the Tenderloin "one of the most competitive retail liquor markets in Northern California."

Mar's ordinance tries to encourage the mom-and-pops to adjust the ratio of healthy to unhealthy products they sell. "Encourage" is key: The program sweetens the transition. Store owners can get help learning how to make a profit selling healthy eats, store redesign to enhance product appeal, and grants and loans for façade improvement, equipment and a redesign consultant. And the city will assign a staffer to the program full time.

To get that help, corner stores must agree to devote 35% of their selling space to healthy foods and limit square footage for tobacco and alcohol to 20%. They don't have to stop

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