

Boeddeker brouhaha – fighting among Friends

BY TOM CARTER

BETTY Traynor, who chaired Friends of Boeddeker Park for its two years of existence, announced at the October meeting she was stepping down, a move that led to an angry exchange causing two candidates for the job to quit the advisory group.

Traynor had earlier sent an e-mail to regular meeting attendees saying that for personal reasons she was quitting her paid job as Outreach Program manager for the Neighborhood Parks Council as well as the Friends' facilitator. At the meeting she added that she needed a short sabbatical, and after the first of the year would resume attending meetings.

"I won't abandon Boeddeker Park," Traynor assured the 18 people at the meeting. "But now we need to talk about new leadership. I need your comments. Any nominations? Several people come to mind," she said, "Dan O'Connor, Jan Rasmussen, Jose (Vega)."

O'Connor, who handles neighborhood outreach for St. Anthony's; Rasmussen, who works for the nonprofit Neighborhood Safety Partnership, and Vega, manager of Presentation Senior Community, regularly attend meetings and have been active for

many months on park improvement projects with Vega's contributions going back 15 months. All three live outside the neighborhood. O'Connor was not present.

Longtime Tenderloin resident David Baker, sitting directly across from Vega, said of Traynor's list, "They do not deserve the right to do it."

Vega, shocked, said, "Excuse me?"

"You do not deserve to do this," Baker said.

Vega slammed his binder shut and stood. Next to him, Abelle Cochico, his assistant who has helped Vega on a dozen Parkscan surveys and senior park cleanups, got up, too, and they stormed out of the meeting. Vega shouted something about people who have "only been coming to meetings for a couple of months" – an obvious reference to Baker, who was attending his third meeting – as the door slammed behind him.

At the end of the table, Rasmussen stood up and tried to halt the fracas as Baker pushed on to say who should be the facilitator.

"It should be residents," Baker said. "And they don't fit that role," he said of Traynor's list. "They're in a support role."

"You've only come to two or three meetings," said Rasmussen, who organized the Tenderloin Kids 4 Safety park parade in July.

"I'm talking about being a resident, and you're not," Baker said.

(The next day, in separate communications, Rasmussen and Vega notified Traynor that they were dropping out of the group. Vega said he will turn his energies elsewhere but would continue bringing seniors to clean up the park. Rasmussen said the group had lately become too negative, a reason

Dan Stein, leader of the Boeddeker Parkscan team, gave when he quit the Friends group in September. She suggested a "closed" group be formed to "plan positive and safe events" at Boeddeker, such as the kids' parade and August senior ice cream social.)

In the ensuing discussion, few speakers shared Baker's view. The majority held that any dedicated volunteer with leadership skills could guide meetings and that "inclusion" was far preferable to exclusion.

Michael Nulty, a longtime activist and co-president of Alliance for a Better District Six, pointed out the numerous hours and responsibilities demanded of a facilitator. In Traynor's two years, attendance at times reached nearly 30, but with few TL residents. And she saw worthy projects pursued and brought to fruition, and communication with city departments enhanced as interest in the improved park appeared to peak in the summer, possibly bringing it to its finest hour. The mayor's liaison then, Marlowe Paraiso, park gardener Thomas Wang and Tenderloin police Officer Gary Peachey were specially acknowledged for their work.

No one stepped forward, so Nulty suggested having a rotating chair for each meeting. The idea was acceptable. And although Rec and Park's Pat Wiley said it was irregular for a city employee to head such a group, the honor fell first to the senior Boeddeker park director she supervises, Rob McDaniels.

Some members wondered whether the group would survive without a strong, consistent chair. ■

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How foundations can help

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take mental health back to the early days of the mental health movement, with a strong emphasis on prevention and intervention and services in the community."

She's concerned, though, about who will make funding decisions.

"The Oversight Committee (which reviews and approves county plans) seems heavily weighted with state government reps," Foster said. "The Endowment would like to see more mental health consumers at the table — on an equal footing."

Philanthropy can help that process, she added, "by jump-starting innovative programs, filling gaps that appear as Prop. 63 rolls out, and improving the capacity of nonprofit providers."

The Endowment just completed a three-year, \$24 million initiative that funded 46 organizations in 15 counties to try out new approaches for linking "hard-to-serve" populations with mental health services.

Dan Corsello, executive director of VanLobenSels/RembeRock Foundation and former director of Napa County Mental Health, is more outspoken.

"It's lousy public policy," he said. "It's not the way allocations should be made, handing over the funding of mental health to millionaires and doing it by initiative. Still, it's the first new mental health money in many, many years."

Corsello doesn't think foundations will change how they fund because of Prop. 63, but he definitely sees a role for philanthropic leaders knowledgeable about mental health as part of stakeholder groups. He has been asked to join Napa County's group and has accepted.

"The key to county planning will be trust among stakeholders," Corsello added. "Everyone has to put aside personal and agency needs in favor of improved services, and to keep that as the target."

Ed Nathan, former executive director of Zellerbach Family Foundation, which funded numer-

ous community mental health projects under Nathan's 23-year tenure, echoed Corsello's sentiments.

"It is too bad that that we have to deal with ongoing needs with special efforts like this," Nathan said. "It shows a desperation for funding; but, on the positive side, it also shows that the voters recognize how great the need is for better mental health services."

Beverly Abbott, former director of Mental Health for San Mateo County and now a consultant to the state, says planning has started in Sacramento, though it's way too early to talk about the process. "But," she said, "the passage of Prop. 63 gives us a real opportunity to do what mental health advocates and family members have talked about for a long time — early intervention, prevention, comprehensive services and more."

Batongbacal's job is to pull together the stakeholders who will present the state Department of Mental Health with a three-year proposal for how San Francisco will spend the new funds.

A few weeks before the election, he brought together about 50 S.F. department reps, consumers, mental health advocates and others for a briefing on the provisions of Prop. 63 — which will become the Mental Health Service Act — and possible scenarios for organizing.

Though he expects things will start moving quickly, he has little to report about the upcoming process.

"Barbara Garcia [Behavioral Health director] said this will be an open public process throughout," Batongbacal said. "In San Francisco, we'll probably have one main body with many subcommittees — supportive housing and consumer-run services — meeting simultaneously, and open to the public."

If you do the math, it's clear that the city has to get cracking. Batongbacal said some of the money may be allocated to the counties as early as April; the big bucks will come starting July 1, but only to counties whose plan has been approved. ■