

Face to face before going head to head

Photos by Carl Angel

Chris Daly got the most votes for District 6 supervisor in the Nov. 7 election, 5,977. Chris Dittenhafer came in second with 2,893. They go head to head in the runoff race on Tuesday, Dec. 12. In an effort to make their views more visibly known in the Tenderloin, *Central City Extra* staff and Editorial Advisory Committee members went face to face with the candidates individually at the *Extra* office on Nov. 30. Both were asked many of the same questions; their answers were wide-ranging. Following is a report on those conversations.

CHRIS DALY was 21 and a recent graduate of Duke University when he moved to San Francisco from North Carolina in 1993. Then-Mayor Frank Jordan's homeless-rousting Matrix program was in full swing. Daly lived in the North Mission, but started working downtown with the Coalition on Homelessness on a project called Empty the Shelters.

In his own neighborhood, housing was a major problem. "There was an abundance of residential hotel rooms that were underutilized — 1,000 rooms within two blocks of 16th and Mission," he said. What does he mean by "underutilized"? "The best use of a hotel room is a permanent tenant."

So in 1995 Daly founded Mission Agenda, which has aggressively advocated for the needs of the neighborhood's under class, chiefly housing. A year ago, Daly said, the group "started working on Sixth Street, knocking on doors, organizing fire prevention workshops."

"People call me a single-issue candidate, with that issue being housing," Daly said. "That's fine with me. But I don't see it that way. Housing is just one issue. Public health is also major: S.F. General, Laguna Honda, community clinics."

"What I'll do immediately is to make the budget process more transparent. When Dr. [Mitch] Katz [public health director] puts forth his budget, the cuts are already in it. You can say that for other departments as well. We need everyday people at the budget process. We'll have additional hearings, and hearings in the neighborhoods. I'll make every effort to get to the hearings the people who are most affected."

"It's time for new politics in the city, new momentum. And I'm going to try to lead that."

Daly moved into the Tenderloin early this year. He feels in touch with TL's needs and endorses the comprehensive neighborhood's Community-Based Platform. Hammered out by neighborhood activists as a statement to the candidates, it calls for full tenants rights, treatment on demand, and the creation of 500 jobs for low-income District 6 residents, among a litany of local needs.

"The Tenderloin has been a dumping ground, neglected inside and out," Daly said. "We need to increase the quality of life on the street, at the same time we have to guard against gentrification. We have to preserve the small, family-owned Vietnamese businesses, and the Vietnamese community needs to be brought into city government. We have to organize with the long-term residents and make sure they can stay here. The city needs to find a balance between holding onto the old and building the new. Even home ownership can be encouraged."

How would you do that?

"The model I like best is cooperatives. They're superior to TICs (tenants in common). For the TIC there is a profit motive. There are no losers in the co-op model. It gives ownership — in the neighborhood. We can keep out folks here. This city is behind many other cities in cooperative ownership of housing. It's a model I'll pursue as supervisor."

But how could cash-strapped Tenderloin residents pay for buildings in this overpriced real estate market?

"What people can afford and the asking price won't add up. So that gap is where the city can step in and help the residents with funds to subsidize the purchases."

"I'm also a fan of the master-lease concept, where the city or a housing management group negotiates a long-term — 20 to 25 years — lease with the hotel owner." He mentions the Jefferson and Windsor hotels in the Tenderloin and the Seneca in SoMa as examples of this model. "It's a model that needs to be expanded. It's not as expensive as the rehab required for federal funding."

What can be done to stop the displacement of nonprofits and small businesses?

"I favor commercial rent control. This is a hot market and we're at the mercy of it; the whole social fabric is being torn because of it."

Should there be a master plan for the future of nonprofits in District 6?

"We should map what's out there. But I'm a little leery of plans. I'm an organizer. I don't care about developing a plan to sit on a shelf."

"We need to foster community leadership. We need more Michael Nultys and David Bakers in the neighborhood. If we don't, it's easier for City Hall to ignore the Tenderloin."

"The Tenderloin is going to get what it needs if it's organized. Community leaders need to be in people's offices telling them what they need."

"I'm going to be involved in developing leadership models for the neighborhood. Hopefully, the neighborhoods will be heard."

Are you going to give us equal time or more than equal time because we have more problems in the Tenderloin than in other parts of District 6?

"The Tenderloin is where 40% of District 6 residents live. We'll work on it together. To the extent that we can get merchants, residents and service providers working together we can do something about the problems."

What about Treasure Island?

"Treasure Island has no stores, no cell phone reception or DSL. The residents all are on fixed leases. There's going to be development out there and the residents there need to have a say about it."

Do you favor treatment or incarceration for first- and second-time drug offenders?

"Proposition 36 was a nice response to three-strikes-and-you're-out. I hope we'll see more treatment and more aggressive peer-based outreach. We need to have avenues open to rehabilitation."

"Addiction is a health issue. People have to be convinced to make a lifestyle change."

Most of the city's budget is accounted for, but the supervisors have discretionary funds. What can you do with them?

"I've been working with the People's Budget Collaborative for two years. [The collaborative, which holds public meetings, was formed several years ago to propose uses for the city's budget surplus that better meet the needs of the city's poor.] The independent majority on the Board of Supervisors will change how [the city budget] is distributed."

How can you help merchants with their issues?

"The block-by-block organizing like what you guys are doing [referring to Adopt-A-Block] needs to be expanded to merchants."

But the merchants dropped out of the Tenderloin Merchants Association because the nonprofits dominated the meetings. We need a safe place to work together, but how can we stop that divide?

"We need to get the [residents, merchants, providers] together to address the bigger concerns."

Taxicabs are a big issue in the Tenderloin. What was your stand on Prop. M?

"The city voted 3-to-1 against it, as I did. My opponent was for it. I support 500 additional cabs. Taxicabs drivers are basically small business owners. There are some serious issues around benefits for drivers."

"We need central dispatching. Maybe we need neighborhood taxi permits as well so Bayview and other neighborhoods can get cabs. We need to expand paratransit taxis and get all the drivers to accept scrip." ■

CHRIS DITTENHAFER arrived in San Francisco 12 years ago from a small suburb of Harrisburg, Pa., where he felt stifled, he said, by the lack of diversity. In 1989, he went to work for Wells Fargo Bank. He has managed various neighborhood branches and now is manager of the West Portal branch.

At each location, "I formed relationships," he said, forging alliances with merchants and residents to work on neighborhood issues: street cleaning on Polk Street, stopping Rite Aid on Haight Street, organizing against Blockbuster Video. He is a past president of the Polk Street Merchants Association and the citywide Council of District Merchants, and is a member of the city's new Taxi Commission.

"One of the main reasons that I'm running for the Board of Supervisors is because I've been doing this [kind of work] for the last seven years" — bringing people with disparate interests to the table and together to figure out how to resolve problems. "We can put on a piece of paper the principal groups and the people, then pick up the phone, call them and say, 'I've got an idea, I'd like to run it by you, can we meet on it?' Then they go out to their groups and try to come up with some kind of a plan."

"I'd like to see neighborhoods have standard businesses, not too many of one kind. A shoe store, a local market — these are all standard businesses that make up a commercial district, yet we see more and more of those closing down. Have public hearings, design a neighborhood commercial district. The Inner Sunset did that after a two-year process."

"The issue is, do you have the services that the residents need? We have so many empty store fronts. Office space is taking over retail. We need to slow that down. The Board of Supervisors can change that."

"You still need to work across the board, with big businesses, too, that employ the people who shop in the small business district. But you need to have a plan."

His experience at Wells Fargo has helped form his problem-solving philosophy — "at Wells Fargo we plan, we project, then go forward" — and given him insider's knowledge of neighborhood problems and some of the agencies and organizations that can play a role in their solution: Council of District Merchants, Police Department, Redevelopment Agency.

When Supervisor Leslie Katz announced last spring that she wouldn't run for re-election, it opened up the District 6 race. Armed with an endorsement from Mayor Willie Brown, Dittenhafer moved to SoMa just days before the filing date and joined the fray.

"I like the different things that go on in District 6 and I always have," he said. "I have experience in the neighborhood. I've built relationships here. I have a unique experience dealing with citywide problems."

Dittenhafer's opponent, Chris Daly, has been most closely identified with residential housing issues; Dittenhafer has been identified with businesses, big and small.

Are you and your opponent worlds apart?

"I believe strongly that we have to protect tenants," he responded. "We need to strengthen rent control however we can, and we need to build more affordable and market-rate housing. I'm looking at the more mixed-use space — multiple apartments on the top floors and retail space on the bottom. The difference between Mr. Daly and myself is that housing is his only issue and his only experience."

What are the big issues in the Tenderloin?

Drug dealing on the street is the greatest problem, according to seniors, he said. "They are afraid to walk out on the streets and to step on needles. We need to bring our DA to meetings so he can hear [their concerns]. I think he's taken a hands-off approach. . . . Drugs are the No. 1 issue I've been hearing from every place that I've visited. It's not just in the Tenderloin. It's in the Mission and every other neighborhood. But it needs to be addressed more in the Tenderloin."

Another problem, he said, is that there's no incentive for a policeman to get out and walk the beat in the city, especially in the Tenderloin. "We need beat officers on the street at night as well as during the day. And as a supervisor, I'd want to take a look at how much officers are paid here."

Overall, however, he said the Police Department "does a fine job with the resources it has available, and I'm a big proponent of community policing."

The Tenderloin does have a "border-town syndrome," he said. Dealers, for example, are pushed from one side of the street to the other, or from one police district to another. "We need a bridged [police] force that crosses over district lines, so officers can report to multiple people at the same time."

How will you encourage community leadership — get people from District 6 to become part of city government?

"Neighborhood councils are extremely important," he responded. "The Tenderloin, South of Market, South Beach — each area has unique issues. I believe in citizen advisory committees. I'll do my best to make sure I'm at those meetings — it's a priority for me to make sure that I listen to everyone. You need to do a lot of outreach" to get people out and active. "You'd be surprised at how much people don't know about what's going on."

Regarding commissions, Dittenhafer said that it won't be easy to lobby the mayor for appointments — "all the supervisors will be pushing" — but "I'll do whatever I can to pressure the mayor."

Proposition 36, which mandates treatment rather than incarceration for first- and second-time drug offenders, is something Dittenhafer admitted he "doesn't have strong knowledge about."

"I'll always be frank if I don't know something," he said. But does approve of the mandate and would seek state or federal funding to pay for treatment. "I always look at here and now and work toward the bigger picture."

Do you support the People's Budget?

With 11 supervisors, there will be a lot of wheeling and dealing going on for those [discretionary] funds. I think District 6 carries a lot of the brunt of the social service funds for the city and that's how [the city] views its funding of the district. I'd like to say, 'Fine, we'll take the weight of the social services, but we need more arts and humanities, not just funds for social services.' ■

What about Prop. M and other taxi issues?

"It took me six months to learn about how the taxi industry operates in this city. There are people who don't want to see neighborhood service improve. My position on the commission was as a neighborhood advocate — to make sure that we get better services to the neighborhoods throughout San Francisco. My goal was to give the commission the ability to issue permits so they could be neighborhood based, something that Los Angeles does."

What can be done to ensure pedestrian safety?

That's "absolutely a big priority," he said. "We have to come up with some solution." He called for timed lights and longer lights in areas where large numbers of seniors live or gather.

You have business connections, but how do you sell yourself to residents?

Dittenhafer said that his work with neighbors and neighborhood groups as well as with business gives him a "broad-based experience and a good understanding of fiscal management and how the city works."

He expects that experience to pay off if he's elected. "It's going to be hard to go in and build consensus with 10 other supervisors — I can do that." ■

The *Extra's* editorial team was composed of staff members Marjorie Beggs and Geoff Link and Editorial Advisory Committee members David Baker, Debbie Larkin, Michael Nulty and Nicholas Rosenberg. The stories were written by Link and Beggs.