

TL, SoMa liquor store owners hit by tough new law

Insiders predict
'hidden costs' will
put budget in red

BY TOM CARTER

The ordinance that is to deliver San Francisco's scruffy neighborhoods from troublesome liquor store scenes was passed by the Board of Supervisors on March 7 and is already raising concern from the store owners who become responsible for policing outside their stores. This makes them understandably nervous; the police, too.

"I worry about owners approaching a crowd," TL Capt. Kathryn Brown said in an interview. "With drug dealing, they're facing desperate behavior and retaliation."

Ten Mideastern owners have been killed over the years, according to Francisco Da Costa, a Bayview-Hunters Point environmental activist. "Where were the supervisors then?" he asked

in the City Hall hallway after protesting the ordinance during public comment. "What was needed was meaningful outreach, community meetings, before it was introduced. Now, there are 300 Mideastern owners in the city who are confused by it."

The ordinance's author, Supervisor Sophie Maxwell, has the Tenderloin,

South of Market, Third Street and the Mission foremost in mind. But it remains to be seen if the \$240,000 budget from the imposed \$264 annual fee on each owner is adequate for enforcement. And the Arab American Grocers Association, which says it represents 425 of the city's 914 stores that are affected, says the ordinance is unfairly aimed at them. First-time violations can cause fines up to \$1,000.

"We met with her (Maxwell) three times and her representatives five times," said association board member and Union Street liquor store owner Shakib Kaileh after the supervisors' first reading on Feb. 28. "She has an attitude — take it or leave it."

Maxwell claims that the measure duplicates existing federal and state laws. The grocers say it is more punitive than the Alcoholic Beverage Control's guidelines when revoking a license. And they bitterly opposed a provision that doesn't allow a new store owner of a problem store to start with a clean slate. The total package is what politicians, liquor control activists and police call a hammer.

Maxwell says her goal is to clean up neighborhoods' disreputable corners by getting rid of drunks, dope dealers and prostitutes hanging out in front of the stores. The ordinance creates a liquor "use" status for off-sale stores called "deemed approved," jargon used to title the

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CENTRAL CITY



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PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Grand Liquors, Turk and Taylor, is among the TL stores police are summoned to regularly.

'It's too harsh'

Life on a corner:
Store owner tells
how rough it is

BY PHIL TRACY

Grand Liquors at Turk and Taylor streets is among the stores that Tenderloin police Capt. Kathryn Brown calls hot spots — where crowds frequently gather, drugs are dealt, sex is solicited and questionable characters loiter.

These stores in the Tenderloin and sim-

ilar liquor outlets in Bayview, the Mission and SoMa are the targets of a new law by Supervisor Sophie Maxwell.

Brown told a community meeting at the TL Police Station on Feb. 28 that the previous month she had six officers sidelined by injuries received from suspects resisting arrest. "Serious addicts are very violent," she said. "Speed-balling — heroin and methamphetamine — makes them go crazy."

Jack Rantisi, brother of the owner of Grand Liquors, a neighborhood hot spot for police, ruefully mulled the ordinance requirements one wet February afternoon inside the store. Near him, a woman paid for the store's last eight sticks of teriyaki jerky, a half pint of Ancient Age and another of Royal Gate vodka that she stuffed in her backpack.

"Bitches selling asses, dealers selling dope," he said, nodding toward a dozen people loitering outside, undaunted by the threat of rain or much of anything. "Why don't the police come to take care of it? We don't have the guns, they do. It's a bad situation."

Kareem Rantisi, his brother and owner of Grand Liquors, says he calls the cops sometimes five times a week, and that they no longer come running every time he calls. "They come in half an hour," he says. "Finally they come and the drug dealers they run away. They ask me where the drug dealers are. I tell them they run away."

"With drugs outside, we can sometimes handle it. But if I can't, it's police's job to handle it. Sometimes I argue with the drug dealers. I tell him to move on from my corner, but sometimes I have to call the police."

Maxwell's measure would — after a long and disputatious process — impose fines of



Owner Kareem Rantisi installed surveillance cameras and a 4-foot-square sign that states his rules.

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