

Down-and-out 6th St. looks to be on the way up

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new businesses the project has nurtured into being.

"We're aiming to create commercial vitality on the street," she said. "We do a range of things: working to attract new businesses, to retain businesses that are there," and "to provide assistance in getting loans."

McNulty has been at Urban Solutions for almost five years. "At the moment, there is a very high vacancy rate on Sixth Street and we're trying to change that," she said. "If someone is willing to open a business in this neighborhood, we're fairly flexible with them." Not more bars or porn shops, however, she added. "We certainly have desired businesses," she said, "but we're not really at the point to say, for example, 'Well, what we really want is a shoe store.' It's really, really tough to fill the vacancies." One space that was recently leased had been vacant for 40 years, she said.

This reporter counted four vacant storefronts on Mission from Fifth to Sixth Street, seven closed locations between Sixth and Seventh streets on Mission, and six spaces along Sixth Street from Market to Folsom — including the side streets and alleys.

McNulty said June had been her busiest month so far.

"Seneca Hotel had two retail spaces vacant for over five years that had previously been occupied by a pawnshop and a bar. Now there's a very bright, cheerful hair salon in one space and a pizzeria about to open in the other space. We think that's a great improvement and we're really delighted," she said.

Dotti Bell, the owner of Ms. Marty's, a school specializing in hair dressing and skin care at 1087 Mission St., said, "Anything they try could only be an improvement. I have 100 students and they try to avoid that area (Sixth Street) like the plague. People urinate in my doorway. The urine runs into my building."

Bell said when Bloomingdale's opens at Fith and Market, business should perk up, and she conceded that the neighborhood does look better. "We've been in the building five or six years and there's definitely been an improvement."

Signs of improvement could be seen along Sixth Street as McNulty led a tour of the area where widened sidewalks, tall banners and new palm trees could be seen. Many storefronts had "for lease" signs by Urban Solutions on their windows. But beneath the bright banners were the same drug addicts, alcoholics and prostitutes one has seen on Sixth Street for years, just killing time or hustling on the new sidewalks and in front of businesses with improved facades.

"When they approved my loan — believe

me — I was so happy," said Ralph Martin, the owner of Hair Masters by Ralph at 40 Sixth St., one of the newly leased Seneca storefronts.

Martin, a flamboyant hair stylist with four gold and diamond earrings in each ear and a tattoo on the back of his right hand that reads, "Hair Master Ralph," began his business with just \$40,000, he said. Martin said he'd been styling hair for 34 years and opened his new business July 22.

"When I told Urban Solutions about my story they never said, 'We can't help you.' They said, 'We'll work with you,' and that is what they did. Business is pretty good," he said. "I started out working by myself. I have four people now."

Martin said he didn't feel as if he was in direct competition with the other barbershops along Sixth Street, such as Tony Barbershop next door, because they serve only male customers. "I have a full-service salon," he said. "We do hair color, perms, braids. ... There's no other hair salon on Sixth Street that does only women's hair."

But Larry Summers, the owner of the San Francisco Barber College at 64 Sixth St., had a different opinion about redevelopment in the area. "I haven't seen it yet," he said. The burnished blues of a jazz quartet on the radio punctuated the hubbub of barber students learning their craft. He glanced over his shoulder to the alley, Jessie Street, next to his school where the illicit traffic in drugs was as obvious as if the dealers had hung out a sign. "This is crack alley, right here."

Summers said he took over the longtime barber school four years ago and has 40 students. Asked what kind of business could make it on Sixth Street, he said, "Probably any business could if you could clean it up and get these derelicts off the street who run your customers away."

Hanin Hakim, the owner of Chico's Pizza at Sixth and Minna Street, added his own perspective. "It's improving. It's better than 10 years ago. I was at 980 Mission St. before, but I've been here for six years. Business is OK."

His cousin, Amin Jamally, will soon open a café at 169 Sixth St., at the Alder Hotel, said Hakim, and Chico's Pizza now stays open later to accommodate the overflow of patrons streaming from Club Six at night.

The flourishing night life on Sixth Street — the Anu Bar at 43 Sixth St., continues to attract a large clientele — has also inspired the owner of the soon to open Mythic Pizza, across the street next to Club Six, to extend his hours also, said McNulty.

Mission Cleaners at 144 Sixth St. and AJD Garment and Cleaners at 1000A Howard St. "were considering locations in Daly City before signing leases" in the area, she said. Both businesses, besides their regular dry-cleaning and wash and fold businesses, also do "garment manufacturing" to supplement their incomes, she added.

McNulty said the owners of Mission Cleaners, which used to be across the street from the Federal Building, had to move after the building they were in was demolished. As far as the impact of the new Federal Building that was being constructed, "the rents on Seventh Street increased, but not on Sixth Street," she said.

Amy Li, the daughter of the owner of AJD Garment and

SOUTHSIDE



Amy Li, who is behind the counter at her parents' newly opened AJD Garment and Cleaners at Sixth and Howard, says, "Business is slow."

Cleaners, said, "business is slow" and that her parents had moved from their previous location because "the owner wanted to turn the space into an office."

Competition for space was one reason Jackie Bell of Reruns Thrift Boutique at 1000B Howard St. moved from Jones Street into this

larger store South of Market. Bell, who was assisted by Urban Solutions, now sells her used clothes in a 4,500-square-foot space. "Everything is just \$2," she said.

Bell said there needs to be more things for the children in the area, and "more police on the beat — more concern for the people who

pay taxes."

Bell says she runs the store with a partner and, sometimes, her brother.

Is she ever afraid when she works in the store alone?

"Absolutely not. You can't be in fear all your life."

John Elberling, executive director of non-profit housing developer TODCO, has worked South of Market since 1978. TODCO, according to Redevelopment Agency records, has received \$13.1 million in agency funds since 1975 to purchase, build and rehab 391 units of affordable SoMa housing, including the landmark Bayanihan House at Sixth and Mission, home to the Filipino community center of the same name.

"There have been some modest improvements," Elberling said, "a little bit of progress, but no fundamental change. To get fundamental improvements we need more residents in the neighborhood and mixed-income housing."

"The city's master lease program has stabilized the housing. Better management in the hotels has taken them from slum hotels and improved the neighborhood. There are more master leases coming, and that will help."

"There were no community assets before 1990," Elberling said, such as the Bayanihan center and Bindlestiff theater, which are the sort of "long-term institutions that Sixth Street has always needed."

"There's definitely been progress. It's happening, but it'll take a while, five to 10 years. The progress is modest, but it's the long-lasting kind. And that's important." ■

Editor and publisher Geoff Link contributed to this report.

Benefit district ends 1st year with \$44,000 surplus

BY TOM CARTER

SHAKING off its growing pains, the North of Market/Tenderloin Community Benefit District, one of five created in the city last year, completed its first fiscal year in the black with all but 8% of the district's property owners paying their assessments on time.

The CBD ended 2005-06 with a \$44,000 surplus despite being owed \$69,000, according to Treasurer Davis Seward, Hastings Law School chief financial officer.

"The delinquents are the Housing Authority, some other federal agencies, BART and a few others. And they'll have to pay," Seward said. "I think it's good we have a little left over for any contingencies."

One property owner, Chinatown Community Development Corp., requested a hardship exemption for three properties. A committee will study the matter.

The district was approved a year ago in a special election. CBDs for Noe Valley, Castro/Upper Market, Fisherman's Wharf and the 2500 block of Mission Street were OK'd at the same time, but the Tenderloin CBD's budget is by far the largest.

Seward submitted a proposed budget of \$868,181 for 2006-07 to the CBD board at its Aug. 3 meeting, held at Hastings. The CBD will receive two payments for this year — a projected \$485,000 in January and \$360,000 in May. The lion's share of it will go to clean sidewalks and erase graffiti.

KEEPING IT CLEAN

The CBD pays the nonprofit San Francisco Clean City Coalition \$600,000 a year to clean sidewalks and another \$60,000 to remove graffiti on buildings up to 10 feet.

"The sidewalk steam-cleaning fights gum

and grime," said Clean City Executive Director Gia Grant. An 8210 Tennant sidewalk cleaning machine sweeps, scrubs and dries as it goes. The district is covered once a month. Slides showed dramatic before-and-after effects on Market and Leavenworth streets.

Twice a day, five days a week in the 30-block CBD district a crew of more than 20 blue-uniformed workers hand sweep sidewalks, alleys and gutters, their work overlapping with the city's street cleaning. On average, the workers collect 45 bags of debris a day and 10 needles, Grant said.

Crews are recruited from such places as shelters and Walden House and are tested for drugs. About 40 attend orientation classes, then are trained and five to eight are hired each month.

From February to June, Grant said, 767 tags were removed in the area. Any fines from arrested graffiti taggers are to go into the CBD treasury.

BATTLE OVER BOEDDEKER

The question came up whether the cleaning service could be extended to the interior sidewalk at Boeddeker Park.

"We want to support the park," said board member Lea Curry, a TL resident. "But we have to consider the uniformity of service and where we go. It's a sidewalk but it is closed at one end, and not a public sidewalk. And there are other problems — people sitting there and bird guano. And we've not been formally asked."

CBD Manager Elaine Zamora said only resident David Villa-Lobos had e-mailed a request but had misrepresented the CBD at a Friends of Boeddeker Park meeting by saying the CBD had refused to clean the interior sidewalk, which it had not, she said.

Lisa Pagan of the Mayor's Office of

Economic and Workforce Development said that because Villa-Lobos also e-mailed the mayor and her office, she wanted to know more. She said the brick path isn't part of the park frontage and is not considered public right-of-way.

"If you don't clean other interiors, it would not be fair to other property owners," Pagan told the board. "There's nothing wrong with saying you can help on a special event. But you shouldn't give it preferential treatment. I've worked on the issue with the city attorney. Rec and Park should clean that path regularly."

On July 27, Villa-Lobos had e-mailed Mayor Newsom, copying the CBD board, The Extra and others, saying that he, Friends of Boeddeker Park and the Neighborhood Park Commission had requested the cleaning and that the request was "rebuffed."

"Please be advised that denial of services by the NOM-CBD to Boeddeker Park will be challenged both through our friends at the S.F. Chronicle and at the BOS (Board of Supervisors), also City Attorney, Court," he wrote to the mayor.

The board decided to keep the request in committee with no recommendation.

RESIDENT UNREST

The issue of resident representation came up. Activist Michael Nulty, who served on the CBD's interim board of directors, protested the makeup of the 15-member permanent board that assigned two seats for residents. Nulty was not elected to the board.

Nulty got up and walked over to the seated board members to distribute a document. But board Chair Jimmy Newell said handouts were to go on a side table before the meeting. Nulty, who continued his rounds, countered that his document wasn't for the public, only for the board.

Two more take turn on cuisine carousel

TWO eateries on Sixth near Market get made over regularly, as if they were on a cuisine carousel, neither seeming able to grab the brass ring.

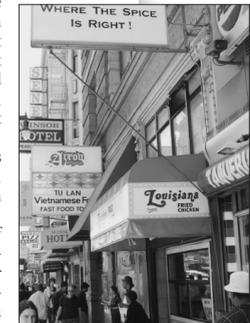
The latest incarnation at 6 Sixth St. is Louisiana Fried Chicken, which earlier this year replaced the well-thought-of Pad Thai Express, which replaced a Filipino/Hawaiian restaurant that followed on the heels of a longtime donut shop that operated 24/7. Louisiana Fried Chicken has a chance to make it. It's pricey, but it serves what people on the street want and has no competition in the neighborhood.

Donut World across the street holds Louisiana Fried Chicken's \$18,000 license, making it one of 75 LFCs, most of them in the L.A. area and Texas.

Across the street, at the corner of Stevenson, is the newly opened Mirch-Masala Indian restaurant, which took over from the short-lived, overpriced but high-quality Hooker's Gumbo Shack, which replaced an illogically upscale Indian restaurant, which replaced the vegetarian Haveli Indian restaurant named for the hotel overhead. All these since 2003.

LFC, next door to the vibrant, venerable Tu Lan Vietnamese landmark, is a maybe. Mirch-Masala, only two months old, already has the look of the doomed. ■

—GEOFF LINK



Ralph Martin, who opened Hair Masters by Ralph on Sixth Street, and Jenny McNulty, executive director of Urban Solutions, talk at Martin's salon. He says, "Business is pretty good." McNulty says, "We're aiming to create commercial vitality on the street."



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO