



Residents' gripes: Scary street people, gangs, feces, garbage

Sgt. Frank Palma, the Tenderloin Police Station's senior liaison officer, was expecting a small group for the Feb. 22 meeting of neighborhood senior and disabled residents. The first meeting, in January, had drawn a disappointing six people to the station's new community room.

"Let's just sit around the table to talk," Palma suggested as the 10 a.m. meeting got under way. "This will be informal."

He explained that the police wanted to meet regularly with seniors and disabled residents — the last Thursday of every month — to hear their concerns about their neighborhood, take immediate action on problems when possible, and build toward solutions for thornier, longer-standing matters.

"We eventually want to make the community a better place for you to live," Palma said.

By 10:30 a.m., 21 people had shown up. The table was full, and other residents and TL service providers took chairs in the main part of the room, participating as best they could. No one was shy about speaking up.

John de Cristo, in a wheelchair, has lived in the TL for 47 years. He said, "Now that you [the police] are here, the loiterers know they can't come around as much. It's better, I think."

A woman at the end of the table disagreed. "At night, every alcove is still full," she said. "They're threatening all the time, assaulting anyone who asks them to move. They're trespassing, and [police] dispatch seems to have no record of this as an ongoing problem."

Officer John Centurioni, quality-of-life officer, explained that the police start rousting loiterers at 3 or 4 a.m., but the effect is short-lived. "I clean them out and they're back almost as soon as we leave, especially if it's raining," he said.

Sgt. Palma added that the police are going to start pushing for prosecuting these "lesser offenses. We need penalties after arrest or citation. Right now, it's a revolving door — they're out before we've even finished writing the report."

He invited anyone who wanted to continue discussing this problem to attend the Feb. 28 general community meeting in this same room (regular schedule: last Wednesday of each month, 6 p.m.). Police Commission members will be there, he said, to hear the concerns of all TL residents.

Moving to a new topic, Palma asked, "When you shop, are the stores stocking what you need?"

One man said he usually found what he needed in the

Asian-owned stores. The two residents in wheelchairs said that despite ramps, many stores pile up cartons inside, preventing them from getting through the aisles. Everyone at the meeting agreed that the neighborhood needs a supermarket — badly.

For an hour, residents threw difficult questions at the officers and voiced frustrations over persistent problems.



A good turnout of residents at the Feb. 22 meeting gave the police real problems to tackle.

A woman who lives on the border between the Northern and Tenderloin police districts: "We have drug-selling gangsters who prey on us because they know a lot of the people in our hotel are dually diagnosed [have a mental disability and abuse substances]. Our management does nothing to stop it, and I call the police two or three times a day."

Officer Centurioni said her address meant that Northern Station, not the Tenderloin, was responsible, and if she wasn't getting satisfaction, he suggested she call the district attorney's office.

Garrett Jenkins, North of Market Planning Coalition president, said that keeping Larkin and O'Farrell graffiti-free might reduce gang activity on that corner. Sgt. Palma responded by passing out a list of 46 city services, Building Inspection to Water Department, and urging people to report problems to the proper authorities.

Community liaison for St. Anthony's, Roscoe Hawkins — who provided a bountiful spread of pastries and dark, rich brewed coffee for this meeting — asked about a growing health hazard: human waste and garbage in the ungated area next to the old Hibernia Bank, the TL police's former home. The officers said the SFPD had no direct responsibility but they'd contact the Health Department.

Skateboarders on sidewalks and bicyclists who ignore pedestrians and traffic signals came in for universal scorn. Most are young and have a pervasive disrespect for seniors, said J.B. Saunders, who said he "works with Glide Church."

"There's age conflict," Saunders said, "and the kids use the rap music to justify their rebelliousness. Maybe we can use this meeting to reach out to some of these young thugs — maybe get them to talk with us."

Neil Tinson of the Salvation Army offered some good news: His organization is slated to open a new shelter program in September for aged-out fos-

line," Palma answered. "1-800-272-2548."

A man who identified himself as Kent said he was new to the TL and had been repeatedly harassed — even chased — by "drug people."

The solution for this situation may come, within the year, in a proposed project of the Neighborhood Safety Partnership, a five-year-old coalition established with Prop. Q funds.

PHOTO: CARL ANGEL

opment and the Department of Children, Youth and Families]."

As with Kampaign Kidz, specific locations such as public and nonprofit agency offices would be designated havens for adults, marked by signs outside. A person who felt threatened would go to a haven and staff there would call 911.

Station Commander Capt. Stephen Tacchini, who arrived late, began fielding more questions from residents and listening to their concerns. Whatever happened to the Guardian Angels? (They disbanded.) Can store owners be stopped from selling alcohol to people who are dangerously inebriated? (Probably not.) White zone passenger curbs have 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. no-parking limitations, but what are disabled people supposed to do after 10? (The captain said he'd "check with parking.")

When the meeting was over at noon, *The Extra* asked Sgt. Palma if he was satisfied with the meeting and turnout.

"Yes, absolutely," he said. "The public is our eyes and ears. We count on them to tell us what to work on."

A month later, at the March 22 meeting, only three people showed up.

"It was disappointing," Palma said. "I even had someone here from the Fire Dept. to talk to the group."

He's hoping attendance will rise again so the police can strengthen their connection to the community. ■

Explained Jose Toledo, Tenderloin coordinator of the Neighborhood Safety Partnership, "We're trying to set up a safe-haven program for adults like the one for kids [Kampaign Kidz, which is funded by the Mayor's Office of Community Devel-

ter kids who, he said, "suddenly are on the street." Also planned: a weekend coffee house and evening social center for Tenderloin youth.

Loiterers and drug dealers came up again. Resident Roy Boseman said that people hanging out in front of the Hospitality House art studio on Leavenworth are really discouraging him. "It's so bad, I almost don't want to go anymore," he said.

That's a continuing dilemma for the police, Officer Centurioni responded: "We get calls to move the loiterers on, but then others tell us, 'Don't hassle them. They're just sweet homeless people.' We need people to be on the same channel."

A woman who hadn't detected the sarcasm in Centurioni's voice objected to the "sweet" moniker. "Some of these people are hard-core gangsters," she said. "They're not homeless. They're organized. Some aren't from the city. Many aren't even disrespectful — they're just there to push drugs."

Sgt. Palma agreed that many of the pushers are not San Franciscans, claiming they come here because, if arrested, the bail is lower and jail times shorter than elsewhere in the Bay Area.

"The bus shelter at Turk and Jones is used by dealers all the time, so seniors and disabled can't even wait there," a resident complained.

When Palma again urged people to use the contact sheet to call the right department, a resident asked who to call to report drug dealing.

"Call the Narcotics Hot-

Need a place to meet? CALL THE COPS!

Places for groups to meet in the Tenderloin are few and far between. There's 111 Jones, where the Lower Eddy/Leavenworth Task Force meets, and 201 Turk, but not much else. Surprisingly, one under-utilized resource is at the new Tenderloin Police Station. The Extra asked Capt. Stephen Tacchini about it, and he replied in what amounts to an open invitation to the community.

The new Tenderloin Police Station's community room — at Eddy and Jones — can be used by any Tenderloin civic, nonprofit, educational and community-based organization that needs a public place to meet. The ground-floor room seats up to 50 people, is wheelchair-accessible, and has bathrooms and a sink.

The room isn't available for social events, events sponsored by for-profit groups, or meetings of more than 80 people.

Since the station opened in October 2000, the room has been used regularly, but there are plenty of open times. To use the community room, submit a written request to my office at least 30 days before the meeting. My staff and I will review requests and approve them based on the criteria above and on room availability.

SFPD holds two regularly scheduled meetings in the room, to which we invite the public: 6 p.m. on the last Wednesday of the month is the Tenderloin Police Station community meeting, and at 10 a.m. on the last Thursday of the month we host a meeting to specifically discuss disabled and senior citizen needs.

The San Francisco Police Department opens the room for the free exchange of information that's of interest to the community and doesn't endorse the views of any groups that use the room.

To request a meeting date, write to: Captain Stephen Tacchini, Tenderloin Police Station, 301 Eddy, San Francisco 94102.