

Off-sale liquor store owners suffer setback by city snafu

Letters announcing information meetings never got mailed

BY TOM CARTER

AN official city letter failed to reach more than 800 off-sale liquor license owners, so only 15 of them attended classes on the nuisance standards imposed on them by an ordinance designed to clean up troublesome neighborhoods.

"Only 13 to 15 have attended these classes," Assistant City Attorney Neli Palma said in a report on the ordinance to a Safety Forum Dec. 12 at Tenderloin Police Station. "It's sad. We are renting rooms at Bill Graham Auditorium and no one attends."

The ordinance by Supervisor Sophie Maxwell was passed in March. It creates a "deemed approved" status for all stores with off-sale licenses, subjecting them to fines and license suspensions if they don't comply with the ordinance. Maxwell was trying to clean up gritty liquor and grocery store scenes in the Tenderloin, Bayview-Hunters Point and the Mission that attract dope dealers, prostitutes and bums, she said. TL has 62 off-sale liquor licenses.

The city scheduled 20 informational meetings in September, October and November to explain the background, purpose, requirements and penalties for noncompliance, and to answer

questions. On Sept. 7, the Department of Public Health ostensibly sent the owners letters with the dates and times.

"There is limited space as the room holds between 50-100 people," the letter said. "Please be advised that if the room fills to capacity that you may be asked to wait until the next meeting."

But that letter wasn't mailed.

And before the mistake was discovered, representatives from Maxwell's office, the city attorney's office, the Police Department and DPH who attended the meetings sat idle. No meetings were canceled.

"We messed up," Virginia Smyly, the DPH director of Community Programs, who handles the ordinance's outreach, told *The Extra*. "And it will be reflected in our report to the Board of Supervisors. We're new at this and we dropped the ball. So we had to pick it up, dust it off and set new dates."

The city sent liquor license owners three letters. The first was from the Tax Collector's office that explained the ordinance's standards and contained an invoice for the mandatory \$240 fee. The second letter, from DPH, had the informational meeting dates. The third rectified the second by adding new dates in December because letter No. 2 was never sent.

"Something happened between

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PUBLISHED BY THE SAN FRANCISCO STUDY CENTER

DEC. 2006
JAN. 2007

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Russian American Valery Moreyno encourages his wife, Lubov, who is blind, to stand and deliver.

CENTRAL CITY

EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

CLASSES FOR ACTIVISTS



PHOTOS BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Director Anh Le exhorts seniors to speak up and empower themselves for their own good.

Training seniors to be grassroots guerrillas

This is the first of a two-part series about Senior University, which teaches the elderly and disabled how to voice their concerns and become neighborhood activists. Several thousand seniors are graduates of this program operated by the nonprofit Senior Action Network since 1994. Their voices have been heard from City Hall to Sacramento to Washington. Part I covers community organizing, public speaking, conducting meetings, direct action and lobbying.

BY TOM CARTER

MARIA Renteria said she didn't speak good English but, yes, she did have a story to tell the more than 40 seniors who had just finished lunch in the dining room at Dorothy Day Community. It was midway through Session I of Senior University, the first of four days over four weeks, a free course in community organizing.

The moderator asked Renteria to stand and speak. Tell it like she was testifying at City Hall, he prodded. He asked for help. David Santos Cortes, a native of Nicaragua and a retired San Francisco City College Spanish instructor, volunteered to interpret. He came to Renteria's side. The smartly dressed woman in her 60s stood and, through Cortes, calmly said:

"I'd like the sidewalks in my neighborhood to be fixed. I fell down once. Repair the holes in the sidewalk."

"*Muchas gracias*," said the beaming moderator Anh Le, who was concluding the Public Speaking segment of Senior U.

Renteria, a city resident since 1962, got a nice round of applause, having demonstrated the ingredients of a succinct advocacy message: She stated the problem, explained how it affected her and offered a solution. Also, in a more subtle lesson on empowerment, she had gotten help in a team effort and had been roundly supported by her peers.

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