

# Peek at mayor's court plan

*Newsom's rep doesn't ask community for input*

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

## GOOD NEWS for...

**THE HOOD** The Extra is preparing a resource guide for the Tenderloin and western SoMa. Funded by the Koshland Committee of the San Francisco Foundation, and advised by a group from western SoMa, the guide will be for neighborhood residents and service providers. Only resources in these two tightly defined neighborhoods will be included. To ensure your resource is in the guide, send pertinent info to [john@studycenter.org](mailto:john@studycenter.org). We don't want any helpful program to be left out.

**TL TEENS** Summertime, and the fish are jumpin.' At least eight Tenderloin teenagers hope they'll hop onto their hooks and into their boat. The eight signed up for the SFPD Youth Fishing Program that each summer takes boys and girls 12-17 from all over the city out on the ocean to fish for salmon. They leave before dawn, July 19, from Fisherman's Wharf. Boeddeker Park Director Rob McDaniels will be the escort. Each chartered boat sailing out under the Golden Gate Bridge will hold 14 kids and one supervisor, besides crew and cops. Kids bring their lunch, but all fishing gear and bait, like the trip, is free. McDaniels says he may make a second excursion before the program ends Aug. 17.

**BLIND PEDESTRIANS** Five Tenderloin intersections now have state-of-the-art devices to help visually impaired people cross the street safely, part of a \$1.6 million project of the Municipal Transportation Agency. The "accessible pedestrian signals" tick in tandem with "walk" symbols, have locator tones and pushbuttons that vibrate so they can be found easily on the poles. They even name the street aloud when held down for a few seconds. In two years, the TL will get another five of the devices, part of a project to install them at 80 intersections citywide. It was a first-in-the-nation agreement, said Linda Porelle, president of the S.F. Chapter of the California Council of the Blind, who called it "historic" with the Council and the Lighthouse for the Blind collaborating on the signal locations. Lighthouse Executive Director Anita Aaron said 1% to 2% of the city's population is sight-impaired. The signals in the Tenderloin are at Eighth and Grove, Hyde and Market; Grove and Van Ness; Market and Van Ness; Fulton and Larkin; and Market and Powell.

**THE PLANET** PG&E recently inaugurated "Climate Smart," a program that enables its customers to join the swelling ranks of carbon-neutral Californians by investing in greenhouse gas emission-reduction projects. By paying an average of \$5 a month extra on their utility bill, customers can invest in projects that reduce greenhouse gases. This in turn "balances out" the emissions that the utility creates in generating electricity and natural gas and helps make the customers carbon-neutral. PG&E hopes to fund projects that annually would reduce greenhouse gases by 250,000 tons. It has put up \$1.5 million to make its own offices climate-neutral, and hopes its customers will contribute \$20 million to the fund over three years.

*If you have some good news, send it to [marjorie@studycenter.org](mailto:marjorie@studycenter.org) or [tom@studycenter.org](mailto:tom@studycenter.org).*

SAY the words — what are the Tenderloin's biggest problems? — and like magic people pile in to have their say.

More than 30 filled the room for the June Tenderloin Futures Collaborative meeting; attendance in April was 11 and in May the number had dropped to six.

But folks turned out this time because someone from the mayor's office was coming to talk about Newsom's controversial proposal for a TL/SoMa community justice center, aka community court.

In December, the mayor returned from New York gushing about opening something similar to Manhattan's Midtown Community Court, credited with helping to clean up Times Square.

Besides Newsom, the project's steering committee includes reps of Superior Court, Public Health, Human Services and the offices of the sheriff, police, pretrial diversion, public defender, district attorney and city attorney.

Julian Potter, deputy chief of staff in the Mayor's Office of Public Policy & Finance, gave the Collaborative a quick court overview, said she was there to hear neighborhood concerns. She posed no questions soliciting direct input about the court. Instead, she asked, "So what are the Tenderloin's strengths and its most pressing problems?"

"We're doing a lot of one-on-one to show other residents we care," said one of the 10 residents at the meeting, an impressive number for any TFC meeting.

"Our socioeconomic problems mean that we're survivors," said another resident. Compassion, diversity, accessibility and density were cited by others as strengths.

"We have a history of fighting problems — and we have fun events here," added the Rev. Glenda Hope, S.F. Network Ministries director and Collaborative chair.

Daniel O'Connor, St. Anthony Foundation community liaison, recalled: "A woman once told me that when people get to know your face here, they watch out for you."

And Carmela Gold, Central YMCA director, got the last word: "There are a lot of avenues for addressing problems."

Hands flew up when it came to the litany of neighborhood problems.

"People come from outside the neighborhood. I see Jaguars pulling up in the alleys all the time."

"There's rampant crack-dealing and the police do nothing."

"The Tenderloin has a history of being a marketplace that facilitates crime."

"It's not possible to separate the social problems from the crime problems."

"Young people are allowed to loiter and they harass residents."

"Services shouldn't be placed right next to where people can buy alcohol and drugs."

Michael Nulty, president of Alliance for a Better District 6,

bemoaned the fate of the existing community courts, coordinated by Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and the district attorney's office.

"We have a lame-duck D.A. who hasn't done her job," Nulty said. "Why hasn't she supported the [existing] community courts? And the same with the mayor. They've left us out of the process."

Potter had started by summarizing the difference between the mayor's proposed court and the existing eight community courts — one of them serving the Tenderloin and SoMa.

"The mayor's version has a judge," Potter said. In the New York model, a law-breaker is brought to the center by police immediately, and the same day gets a public defender and appears before a judge. "The judge has different social service options for the law breaker," she said, "and there are consequences if he or she keeps showing up before the judge."

In the current community courts, residents volunteer to sit on panels that hear misdemeanor cases and hand down sentences, including restitution and community service.

A Superior Court FAQ sheet on the proposed center calls today's community court "not a court but rather a mediation program" to handle misdemeanors and will likely be "included in the list of services" available at the center. The sheet doesn't describe what kind of crimes the community justice center judge would hear, so The Extra asked Potter.

"It's really up to the neighborhood," she said. "Maybe it wouldn't be rape and murder, but it

could be felonies."

Potter closed by reiterating her claim that the center is a work in progress: It has no official name yet, its boundaries are "fluid," its location undecided. In May, Newsom, D.A. Kamala Harris and Superior Court Judge David Ballati looked at three sites: 50 U.N. Plaza, 245-259 Hyde and 150 Otis.

After the meeting, The Extra talked with resident Mark Ellinger, a TL/SoMa community court panelist.

"This is a really contentious issue, especially among those of us who've worked to make community courts succeed," Ellinger said. "We've been struggling with the D.A.'s office and police about how they deal with quality-of-life crimes, asking them to funnel them through our courts, but we never got anywhere."

"I don't speak for everyone, but the D.A.'s office is turning its back on our courts and it's insulting to a lot of us. I'm fed up with it."

"We used to have 30 to 40 cases a month and needed extra sessions. The last few courts I paneled, we heard four or five cases."

Ellinger bristles: "I don't see any restorative justice in this model. It sounds punitive, and the idea of calling it a community justice center is just semantics."

The Board of Supervisors hasn't bought into the proposal yet, either. At the June 28 budget committee meeting, Supervisor Aaron Peskin called the proposal "all over the map" and asked for a formal plan before okaying the mayor's entire \$750,000 request to launch the court. The committee voted to put \$250,000 in reserve. ■

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Michael Nulty  
PRESIDENT, ALLIANCE FOR  
A BETTER DISTRICT 6



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