

Real Estate grabs U.N. Plaza arts and antiques market

BY HEIDI SWILLINGER

CITY Hall has taken over the Antiques and Artisans Market at U.N. Plaza, and Mary Millman isn't happy about it.

In fact, Millman — who established the market nine years ago and has managed it as a private concern ever since — is livid. She says the city used tactics she considers high-handed, wresting a smooth-running, three-day-a-week operation from her in an effort to stanch record-high budget shortfalls.

The city, in the person of John Updike, assistant director of real estate, says it's not about the money. The real issue, he says, is that the market needs new

blood and the city can do a better job of managing what is, after all, public property.

Millman and Updike also differ on other issues.

For instance, for years Millman paid \$50 each market day — from \$600 to \$700 a month — to Rec and Park, which had jurisdiction over U.N. Plaza. She says that arrangement lasted until the department notified her that it would no longer manage the plaza, referred her to the Department of Public Works and stopped cashing her checks. She ultimately stopped making her payments in 2006.

She believes Updike took advantage of her confusion about rent payments and used it to spearhead an effort to get the Board of Supervisors to revoke

her permit last month — a few days after Millman says she made good on her past-due payments.

Updike acknowledges that Rec and Park did a poor job of pursuing payment from Millman. "Both parties goofed up," he says. "We're not going to hold that against Mary."

Millman and the city differ on how much she charges market vendors to sell their wares under canvas canopies she provides. She says \$45 to \$50; Updike says vendors pay \$35 to \$75.

Millman says they also disagree on how much revenue the market can reap. The city thinks the antiques market and Farmers' Market combined could bring in \$579,150. Millman she says she's never grossed more than \$110,000 a year; the Farmer's Market made \$187,000 in 2007 (see the May 2008 edition of Central City Extra).

She says the city plans to raise vendor fees. But Aug. 28 Updike assured a group of vendors at an open-air meeting at the market that the city won't raise rates. He added a caveat: "We do want to make sure it's a fair market rate." He said any profits will be plowed back into the plaza.

He and other city staffers asked the vendors to fill out forms listing how much they pay in rent, how much space they need, and the status of their business tax and seller's permits. Updike says the city hadn't been able to gather exact data about the inner workings of the market until Millman's permit was revoked.

Long story short, according to Millman: "They're confiscating my business. And the worst thing is the fraud and character assassination they did to accomplish this. I think this is illegal."

Long story short, according to Updike: "Money is the least of the issues. It's one of better coordination."

David Seward's long story short is a mixture of Millman's and Updike's. Seward is chief financial officer at Hastings College of the Law, and he has spoken to city officials on Millman's behalf. "The initial perception was that the city had issues with contractual nonperformance," he says. "But it seems the real driver here is the city's belief that it can run these operations better."

The only thing Millman and Updike appear to agree on is that Millman has done a great job of turning U.N. Plaza into a much nicer place than it was in 1999, when it was rife with crime, litter and homeless campers. "It was awful," says Millman. "People who weren't there then don't really know how bad it was."

Seward, who has worked in the neighborhood for 25 years, backs her up. He says others made efforts to improve the plaza, but didn't have staying power. "The Farmers' Market and the Antiques and Artisans Market have been the only operations with the commitment and perseverance to make a difference at that plaza," he says.

Updike acknowledges that Millman deserves credit for improving the atmosphere. "Mary has done a terrific thing. She needs to be thanked," he says. "But a decade later, it seems to be getting a little tired. We hope to bring new energy." ■

City to unveil help-for-hoarders plan at mental health conference

BY HEIDI SWILLINGER

IF you're among the 1 in 30 San Franciscans who have a problem with hoarding, take heart: You're in the right city to get help.

San Francisco, site of an annual conference on hoarding this year on Oct. 29 is where a groundbreaking effort to tackle the issue is in the works.

Hoarding, as defined by the Mental Health Association of San Francisco, which sponsors the annual conference, is the compulsive accumulation of possessions and an inability to discard them, even when they can pose health hazards, threaten relationships or result in eviction.

Family Service Agency clinician Judy Hirsch estimates there are 25,000 compulsive hoarders in the city.

The behavior is sometimes linked with depression and attention-deficit disorder. Some people realize that clinging to their possessions is causing them problems but can't change; others are unaware, says Hirsch. "It's a hidden problem in many cases."

Compulsive hoarders often collect things others consider junk. Marlo Tellschow, who leads an MHA peer support group, has worked with people who save yogurt containers, intending to recycle them, or junk mail, planning to pass items on to people they think can use them. Tellschow, who tends to obsessively save papers and printed material, says she routinely clips stamps off envelopes, a practice she started after seeing a sign somebody posted requesting canceled stamps. Hoarding, she says, "often starts with a worthy goal, but it gets out of control."

Hoarding, an ancient problem, only recently has been recognized as a mental health issue. MHA started focusing on it in the mid-1990s, when a surge of clients began facing eviction because of hoarding, says acting Executive Director Lisa Brabo.

MHA's first conference was in 1997, held in a

meeting room at the Main Library. This conference will be at the Westin Market Street hotel, and Brabo expects professionals from across the nation to attend.

Compulsive hoarding can result in fires; people get hurt when they stumble over their belongings; dust from the clutter can cause asthma; mice and rats often thrive in the mess.

With the consequences of hoarding so far-reaching, the city has established a task force to study the issue. Social service providers, health care workers, mental health experts and attorneys, along with residents who compulsively hoard and are working to change their behavior, began meeting last summer.

Christiana Bratiotis, a doctoral candidate at Boston University who is studying how U.S. cities are coping with hoarding, says fewer than 50 cities have convened task forces, and not all are adequately funded. "San Francisco is studying it in a meaningful way," she says. "I don't know of another task force model around the country that has been so comprehensive."

Task force members will unveil at the conference their recommendations for creating a community support system to address hoarding. Other topics include clinical and self-help strategies.

The conference is open to people who hoard, the people who love them, and the people who interact with them for health, safety and legal reasons.

FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

The Mental Health Association conference on hoarding and cluttering will be held Oct. 29, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Westin San Francisco Market Street hotel at 50 Third St. The conference costs \$95, but scholarships are available for low-income people. Application deadline for scholarships is Sept. 19. Access forms online at www.mha-sf.org, or visit the MHA office at 870 Market St., Suite 928. ■

Residents' rights violated at most of the SROs

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zation's Jorge Portillo knows what's sure to show up, especially from residents of low-end fleabags that pay clerks minimum wages.

"Some SROs are charging (overnight) visitors and some are restricting the visitor rights — which is what tenants are afraid of," Portillo says.

His counterpart in the Tenderloin, lead tenant organizer Peter Masiak, says education is his goal. Leafletting comes first, then meetings that he'll organize with owners, police and tenants.

"We're trying to get an educational campaign going to make hotel owners and police aware of tenants' rights," Masiak says. "Most know there aren't supposed to be fees. Beyond that, they don't know."

The fees caused an outcry eight years ago. It was a rampant practice of desk clerks to charge guests up to \$20 for an overnight visit. Hundreds of complaints went to then City Attorney Louise Renne.

The Board of Supervisors created the SRO Hotel Safety and Stabilization Task Force in 2001 to fix the problem. The task force approved the visitor policy. It was adopted by the board in 2002.

The policy outlawed overnight visitor fees and, among other things, allowed SROs to suspend overnight visitor privileges for a month, if a tenant didn't follow the rules. The policy made police the enforcement arm and the Rent Board the administrator, and allows a tenant to file a complaint with the Rent Board and possibly get a rent reduction.

But it rarely happens.

"To be honest, not a lot of them (come to the board), one or two a year, not as many as could be," Delene Wolf, the board's executive director, says. "Ours is not a satisfactory remedy. People want their rights, not so much the money."

"The policy is fabulous, though," Wolf added, "a great improvement. It's one of the most satisfying things we've done at the Rent Board and I'm proud of our role. But there's no enforcement power."

It's not easy to deal with the sketchy SRO population. Some hotels are owned by nonprofits, others by private businesses or by the city. Tenants occupy 8- by- 10-foot rooms without kitchens or bathrooms, if they are among the many 70-year or older hotels. Low-income pensioners and welfare recipients are mixed with physically and mentally disabled, addicts and formerly homeless. Ex-cons gravitate to SROs.

But a difficult population doesn't trump rights. And Allen White had been attentive to them since serving on a Rent Board advisory committee on the visitor policy a few years ago. A former Bay Area Reporter writer, and for 10 years Glide Memorial Methodist Church's media coordinator, White knew the rules weren't being followed in many SROs. He wanted to test the system, and see how and where it broke down.

"It was a deliberate visit to test the law," Foley told The Extra of White's prearranged visit in March. "We knew what we'd encounter."

The visitor policy White branded that night was the latest version, amended Oct. 23. It says:

"The visitor does not have to be present at the time the (overnight) request is made and the visitor's name need not be provided until the visitor arrives at the hotel, after which time the visitor shall have the same in and out privileges as the resident." But on the West's wall was the 2006 version, stating the opposite — an SRO guest had to be present and named when the tenant made the request.

The Rent Board put the amended policy on its Website in late January and notified the advisory committee to spread the word to "come and get" copies at the board's 25 Van Ness Ave. office, Wolf said. It was available on 11- by 17-inch sheets in seven languages. The updated version is to be "prominently" posted "on a minimum size of 11- by 17-inch by the entrance or in the lobby."

White went to the Tenderloin Police Station the day after his test at the West. The cops told him they couldn't do anything, it was a civil not criminal matter, a policy, not law. Wrong, Allen said. Under the S.F. Police Code, Sec. 919.1(b), "any operator, employee or agent of a Residential Hotel" who violates any provision of the policy is guilty of an infraction and can be fined from \$50 to \$500. But the cops wouldn't make a police report, White says.

A week later, White emailed a four-page report and cover letter about the West incident to Police Chief Heather Fong. It specified four sections of the Uniform Visitor Policy that were violated in the Administration and Police codes. Fong said she was filing a police report with the General Works section.

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