

Robbery Roulette

Chances are, if you're not careful, you'll get mugged

BY TOM CARTER

THE bad news is the Tenderloin has more robberies per square block than any of the other nine police districts in town. The good news is — as violent as robberies can be sometimes — they're not getting any rougher and the number is down. If a projection holds, robberies will be down 27% this year from last.

Still, the vulnerable poor, elderly and disabled residents, with few dollars on them, cautiously navigate streets day and night in the city's poorest and most densely populated neighborhood looking over their shoulders, hoping their number won't come up in the roulette of robbery probability. Everyone who hasn't been robbed knows someone who has. Sometimes it's brutal.

A Central City Extra study of the Tenderloin's 64 robberies during a 90-day period March 12-June 9 shows that among the 24 intersections comprising the TL police district, only one, at Mason-O'Farrell, didn't have a robbery within a half block of it. The

Jones Street corridor from Market to O'Farrell had 12 robberies in or near it, the most of any street.

Those who fecklessly brandish iPhones and laptops as they pass through the Tenderloin have every reason to be cautious, too. The items are prime

booty for desperate people pulling "opportunistic robberies," which most are, police say. Even if victims aren't injured, a mugging still makes a haunting, indelible memory that can shake confidence in the security of the community, as the attempt on me did.

Never get overconfident about your ability to walk safely through the Tenderloin. That's my personal rule now.

I was a victim of an attempted bodily force robbery May 26 on my way from Market and Seventh streets to the police community meeting at the Jones and Eddy station. Going up Jones, I took a detour east on Turk to ask some questions of the Tenderloin Liquors owner. Walking on Turk's north side, I saw the usual crowd in the middle of the 100 block.

I've walked the TL six years. I know where the idlers congregate, how they act, when to be casually evasive and when to cross the street. It helps that I'm a nimble, former high school point guard, a lifelong tennis player and in denial of my 70 years.

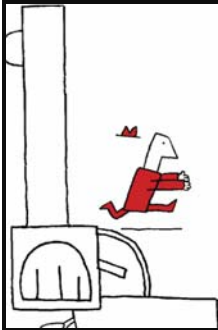
It was around 6 p.m., sunny and pleasant with normal street and sidewalk traffic. I was walking through maybe eight people, quickly, with longish steps, head slightly down, eyes fixed ahead, concentrating on questions I'd soon ask the store owner. Suddenly, just past the Camelot Hotel, a man who had been leaning against the wall to my left

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

SRO MAILBOX LAWSUIT

P.O. plans to derail it

PAGE 2



TENDERLOIN ROBBERIES DECLINE

On pace to 6-year low

PAGE 3

OBITUARIES

PAGE 6

CENTRAL CITY

EXTRA

SAN FRANCISCO

PROPOSITION D



GOOGLE EARTH

Proposition D would create a special district for the 2-block-long, 2-short-block-wide area outlined above, allowing signs on Market Street that promote the central city's theater and arts district.

Marketing mid-Market

Special district that would OK a slew of signs makes ballot

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

WARFIELD Building owner David Addington gleefully described his July 1 trek to City Hall to three Central City Extra reporters sampling wurst at the just-opened Showdogs designer hot dog eatery — which

he co-owns — how he'd marched over to the Elections Department, five days before the deadline, with his Mid-Market Special Sign District ballot initiative, 12,000 supporting signatures strong, accompanied by an enthusiastic entourage of 20 kids and teachers from the Rescue Mission's City Academy summer program.

He'd spent several years, he said, working to bring general advertising back onto Market Street from Fifth to Seventh streets, returning the central city stretch to its former glory days as a theater district. The kids were part of the march because if the initiative passes in November, Tenderloin and South of Market youth groups like theirs stand to get up to 40% of sign advertising revenue for arts and education programs.

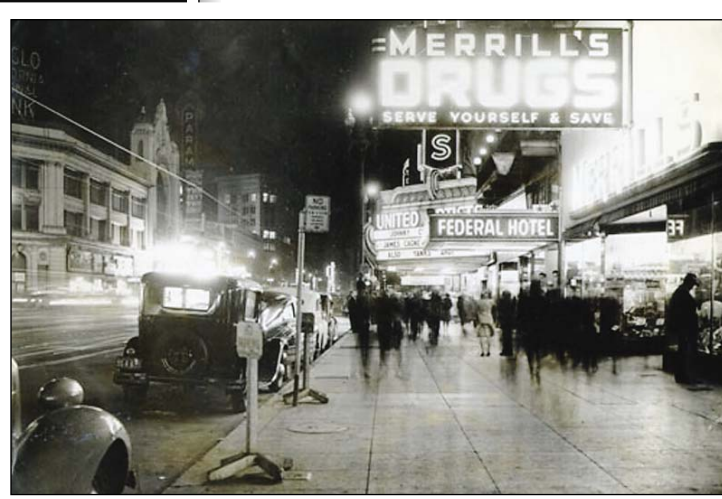
Addington's ebullience for the special district hasn't dimmed since then, but reality has crept in as opposition to it mounts. The initiative, Proposition D, has become yet another version of politics — as usual — for Market Street. Only four years ago, a San Francisco Business Times story, "Market St. developers hope to turn seedy to artsy," chronicled the Mid-Market PAC's 10-year effort to transform it from Fifth to 10th streets.

The Redevelopment Agency approved the PAC's plan and the Planning Commission said it conformed to the city's General Plan, but it met organized neighborhood resistance, was panned by Supervisor Chris Daly for not enough affordable housing, and died in committee.

Addington and Carolyn Diamond, Market Street Association executive director, were prime movers in the PAC. She joined as Prop. D co-author in June.

"I do think this is a controversial issue,"

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



S.F. HISTORY CENTER, S.F. PUBLIC LIBRARY

Seventh and Market was ablaze with lights and nighttime activity in 1943.

GOOD NEWS for...

THEATER-LOVERS The peripatetic 10-year-old Bindlestiff Studio, with performances of emerging Pilipino and Filipino American artists, will stop its wandering early next year and finally move into a long-term venue. In August, the Redevelopment Agency unanimously approved a \$52,000 loan to Bindlestiff for constructing a ground-floor, "black box" theater space in the Plaza Apartments at Sixth and Howard streets. Redevelopment bought the property in 2000, razed it in 2003, and financed the new structure, 106 affordable studios, that opened in 2006. The 2001 resolution authorizing Redevelopment's purchase named Bindlestiff as the new building's permanent, ground-floor tenant, but the theater group was unable to raise funds. Under the terms of the Redevelopment loan, Bindlestiff has to make the space available to other performers at least half the time.

REAL DO-GOODERS The city's Community Challenge Grant Program makes awards twice a year to residents, businesses, community groups and nonprofits for neighborhood physical improvement projects, especially those that create green spaces, gathering places, public art and other community amenities. Grant awards and matching requirements depend on size and duration: A small six-month project can get up to \$10,000 but must find a 50% match; a six-month, medium-size project grant runs from \$10,000 to \$25,000 and requires a 25% match; for large, one-year projects, grants are \$25,000 to \$100,000 with a 25% match and proof of successful past projects. Residents or business owners can form a committee or group to implement a project, but they need a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to serve as their fiscal sponsor. The last day to submit applications for this round is Sept. 30. Last round's recipients included the Vietnamese Elderly Mutual Assistance Association, awarded \$12,370 for its Little Saigon Beautification Project, and the Polk Street Commercial Corridor/Larkin Street Youth Services, which received \$15,000 for the Polk Street Corridor Community Clean-Up Project. In that round, program grants city-wide totaled \$500,000. Information: www.sfgov.org/ccg or Lanita Henriquez, program manager, 554-4830.

If you have some good news, send it to tom@studycenter.org or marjorie@studycenter.org

SRO mail suit faces test

P.O. wants it tossed, saying city has no right to sue

BY JONATHAN NEWMAN

A FEDERAL lawsuit filed by the city attorney in May that challenges the U.S. Postal Service's suspension of individual mail delivery to SRO residents — even where their buildings provide designated mailboxes — is about to be tested.

Sept. 4 the Postal Service will ask U.S. District Judge Jeffrey White to dismiss the case, according to Jack Song, the city attorney's deputy press secretary, arguing the city has no legal authority to sue on behalf of SRO residents.

The city's lawsuit — filed jointly with the Central City SRO Collaborative, the San Francisco Tenants Union and the Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco — says that the suspension policy unfairly discriminates between SRO residents and other apartment dwellers and violates the Postal Service's own regulations. Instead of responding to those charges, the Postal Service will press the narrow argument that the city of San Francisco lacks the legal standing to sue a federal agency in this instance.

The suspension of individual mail delivery in SROs, announced by the Postal Service in December, is one of its efforts to remedy "fiscal shortages," a self-described \$7 billion revenue loss. In the past year, USPS has closed or consolidated nearly 700 administrative centers nationwide, offered early retirement to 150,000 postal employees, reduced the number of collection boxes and raised the cost of first-class postage. In early

August, the Postal Service released a list of hundreds of post offices under review for closure or consolidation, including three in San Francisco: Bernal Heights, McLaren Park and the new Federal Building.

Although the Tenderloin's main postal facility at 101 Hyde St. was mentioned for possible closure on the Postal Service Website, it didn't make the final list.

"These are tough economic times for everyone," said James Wigdel, USPS spokesman in San Francisco, in a phone interview. "The Postal

Service has to address revenue losses and is looking at everything, including routes, schedules and retail operations. Hyde Street is not on the list for possible closure." The USPS, he added, doesn't comment on lawsuits.

Stephen Collier, lead attorney for the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, which represents Central City SRO Collaborative, San Francisco Tenants Union and the Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco, said, "We have opposed the request to dismiss. We don't think the USPS will be successful." ■



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Boeddeker remake forges forward

TWO architectural drawings of improvements residents are dreaming up for Boeddeker Park will be available at the remaining Trust for Public Land outreach meetings at the clubhouse as the park's renovation plan continues to unfold.

The Trust's Jennifer Worth made the announcement at the Aug. 13 Friends of Boeddeker Park meeting. One drawing is based on changes costing \$3 million, a sum already secured. The other reflects an \$8 million upgrade, although that amount now seems iffy.

The first designs, available at the Aug. 20 outreach meeting, will be redrawn to reflect input from Sept. 16, Oct. 3 and Oct. 20 meetings.

The Trust's Jake Gilchrist, who got the park renovation project rolling several years ago, said later that the state Prop. 84 bond funds voted in 2006 aren't available yet. The Trust planned to apply for the maximum allowable \$5 million, but the neighborhood's suggestions wouldn't cost that much and state bond sales are in abeyance because of the stale economy.

"Our goal is to start construction in 2010 and be complete in 2011," Gilchrist said. "The state isn't selling bonds and we can't wait beyond Jan. 1. People are engaged and we have momentum."

Even if the state snaps to in time, the Trust might be going for just \$4.5 million, which could be good. "We don't want the park over-cluttered," Gilchrist said. "And whatever it is, it will be a community design." ■

—TOM CARTER



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64 robberies in TL in 90 days – on pace to 6-year low

BY TOM CARTER

A CENTRAL City Extra study of robberies in the Tenderloin from March 12 to June 9 shows a trend of fewer robberies this year than last and reveals some unusual patterns of the crime.

During those 90 days, there were 64 robberies in the 36-block police district, an average of 1.8 per square block, highest in the city. The majority were within two blocks of the police station.

Projecting the quarterly figure, the TL can expect 27% fewer robberies this year than last.

Monthly totals in the Tenderloin fluctuate unpredictably from 15 to 40 robberies or more. Annual totals vary, too. The robbery bell curve over eight years looks like the Alps. Starting in 2001: 338, 284, 249, 336, 271, 364 and 331 in 2008.

If the 13%-25% up-and-down trend holds true, 2009 will have 256 robberies, the lowest in six years.

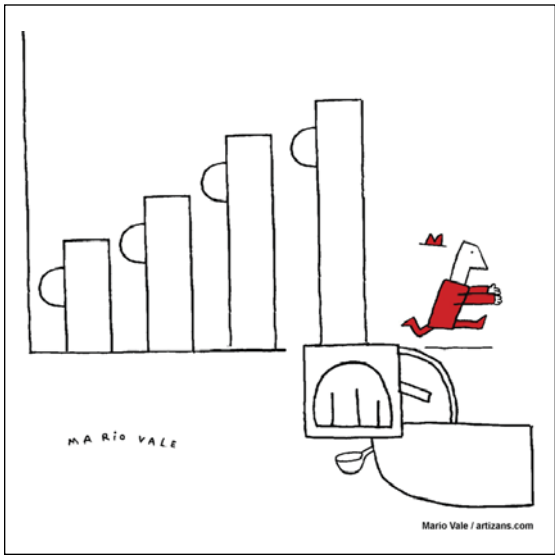
The 90-day statistics from the Police Department's Crime Maps unit reveal that the methods used for robbery were fairly divided: 23 cases of strong arm (using threats), 22 of bodily force (hands on) and 19 with weapons. Most incidents happen at night using the cover of darkness when few witnesses are around and fewer cops on duty. The crime drops off after 2:30 a.m. Robbery is stealing by force or intimidation; burglary, is breaking in to steal.

More police on the street and better communication with residents is happening. Elderly, often reluctant to step forward as robbery victims, "have been getting better at reporting," says Street Crimes unit Sgt. Mark O'Brachta. "Immigrants, too. We're not concerned about documentation. We won't turn anyone over to the INS. We're a sanctuary city."

"People call in (911) or just stop us on the street to tell us what's going on. We get anonymous tips, too. Maybe someone knows about a drug deal and a gang that's going to hit it. And, yes, we are authorized to pay for tips, depending on the circumstances."

The Tenderloin's population makes it a different kind of robbery turf from other neighborhoods. Store robberies aren't as frequent here as elsewhere because it's easier for predators to spot weak targets on the street and snap spontaneously into action. Anyone alone and reduced by age, drugs or alcohol, or physically impaired, is game. A healthier mark,

SPECIAL REPORT



MARIO VALE/ARTIZANS.COM

but alone, can be hit by two to four robbers, too.

Prime booty in these spontaneous crimes of opportunity is purses, iPods, iPhones and laptops. Shakedown for just a few bucks are common, too. Just about every elderly person has a story or knows of someone else's.

Melissa McNeill, 82, is a 25-year resident of the Tenderloin. She's been victimized three times, maybe more, she can't remember. Once she was walking on Leavenworth between Eddy and Turk when a "good-size" black woman appeared out of nowhere, slammed her against the wall, snatched \$13 out of her pocket and disappeared around a corner. "I don't know if she saw it sticking out," McNeill says, sitting in the Curry Senior Center on Turk where she's a regular. "It happened so fast I was ga-ga."

She reported that robbery but not the next: She had just gotten \$17.50 in change back from a \$20 bill at Barah's Market, corner of Leavenworth and Turk.

"A man followed me out the door, reached in my pocket and took it and my ID and everything. He ran up Leavenworth. I never saw his face, just his back so I didn't report it. But around the Empire Grocery they just reach around me and into my pockets — there's more around there than anywhere else."

For cops to catch the bad guys they need a 911 call, a location and good description of the robber. They caution people not to fight back and to call immediately. Attempted robbery is a crime, too, and, reported, can lead to an arrest later.

It's especially helpful when witnesses stay the course. Maurice "Moe" Jackson did in February after being astonished and appalled to see a brutal robbery unfold at the Market and Hyde streets bus stop. As a woman was boarding the bus, a panhandler stepped up and yanked the purse so hard it pulled her back down. Then he slugged her in the face to rip the purse off her arm.

"Cold-cocked her," said Jackson, another Curry Senior Center regular. "And I was mad."

The robber ran off with Jackson and others in hot pursuit. Someone called 911 as they ran, giving location updates as they continued west. A volunteer track coach in the East Bay, Jackson, at 72, can still do 40 meters in 6.8 seconds, he says. But carrying a 13-pound backpack that day winded him and his legs were "burning" when the pursuers and arriving police converged in front of Herbst Theater on Van Ness Avenue. Police took the suspect to the ground and made the arrest.

"I just wanted to stomp him, but I didn't," Jackson said. "The woman reported it and it ran in the Examiner's police blotter."

But a flaring temper can hurt a victim. A few blocks away, Ron Santiago, 60, was finishing his oatmeal one morning in June at an overflowing senior drop-in center that requested anonymity. He remembered two months before, in front of his apartment building at Larkin and Ellis at 11 p.m., when he called the desk clerk on his iPhone to let him in. A husky black man in his 40s came up behind him and grabbed the iPhone.

"I got angry," Santiago said. "I fought him." Santiago lost. He suffered two broken ribs, he says,

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

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photo: Bernard Andre

Prop. D vote to market mid-M

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Diamond said, “but that’s what I really like about it. It will bring buzz to the area. It’s a big, unusual idea. Maybe it will be what finally brings economic development to mid-Market.”

The proposed district includes 52 buildings. Each could sport new signs — though some might be as small as 2 feet by 5 feet — bringing much-needed revenue to an area where half the ground-floor retail is shuttered and, Addington estimates “conservatively,” more than 50% of the office space is unoccupied.

Prop. D’s biggest hurdle is that it exempts the district from two hard-won zoning laws: One, on the books since 1970, bans all general advertising on Market Street from the Embarcadero to Octavia Boulevard. The other,

and other supporters have been making the rounds looking for ballot endorsements and community support. They’ve been to the Alliance for a Better District 6, Tenderloin CBD, Tenderloin Economic Development, SPUR, Yerba Buena Alliance, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Golden Gate Restaurant Association, Union Square Association, San Francisco Architectural Heritage and many more.

“Mostly, people have been positive,” Diamond said.

But, by late August, Addington conceded, “I know this is going to be an uphill battle.”

WHAT THE ORDINANCE SAYS

Eleven sometimes technical pages long, Prop. D calls the proposed district “a distinct segment of downtown ... a locale for entertainment and arts institutions.” The hope is that signage will give a shot of energy to what’s there now. Theaters include the Golden Gate, Warfield, Market Street Cinema, Crazy Horse, St. Francis and the Regal (both recently closed). The Guild at 1069 Market and the Centre at 1071 Market, both built in the 1920s, closed in 1987 after decades of showing adult films. The number of arts venues is few, just The Luggage Store and Red Ink Studios.

Prop. G’s citywide ban on general advertising may be appropriate for other locales, but Prop. D calls it “an unfair burden” on mid-Market owners who could use the revenue to “maintain or establish entertainment and arts venues in their building, creating a unified and distinctive visual environment.”

The initiative limits signs to 500 square feet, which is minuscule compared with the ad on the south side of 995 Market St. (See photo at left.) Allowed, with conditions on height, position, movement and illumination, are roof signs, wind signs, video and digital signs, rotating signs, wall signs, signs with moving parts and illuminated signs. All must conform with the sign district’s stated purposes: To make the area attractive as a tourist destination, reinvigorate mid-Market, retain and not compromise the area’s historic architectural character, and use portions of ad revenue to fund neighborhood youth and arts activities.

The Central Market Community Benefit District, formed in 2006, with boundaries extending from Fifth to Ninth along Market Street plus parts of Stevenson, Jessie and Mission streets, will be the sign district’s administrator and fiscal sponsor. When a building owner wants to sell sign space, the first stop for decisions about its conformity and contract review will be a new CBD subcommittee.

Members won’t be named until the initiative passes, if it does, Addington says, but they’ll include experts in architectural heritage, reps from the Planning Department and the Arts Commission, members from the Central Market and Tenderloin CBDs, residents, small business owners and other neighborhood stakeholders. After the subcommittee vets a proposed sign, it needs permit approval from the Department of Building Inspection.

Property owners don’t get to keep all the revenue from green-lighted billboards. If their building’s ground floor is used primarily for arts activities (as defined by the Planning Code), owners must contribute 20% of the revenue from each sign to a special district fund; if the space isn’t used for arts, they pay 40%.

PROGRAMS TO BENEFIT KIDS

The CBD collects the revenue and decides how to apportion it. The initiative lists priorities: arts education programs for youth — the CBD will probably solicit proposals from neighborhood groups; a Hallidie Plaza booth to sell tickets to arts, entertainment and cultural activities in the district; and CBD expenses for administering the district. The CBD can use leftover revenues to promote arts in the area.

Asked how much revenue the district might rake in, Addington says he has no figures yet but has hired someone to create a financial model.

“Ad revenue is based on ‘impressions’ — how many people pass a sign on the road or on foot,” Addington explained. “The number of impressions in this area is questionable

Prop. D would allow signs like this one on the back side of 995 Market St. (facing Mission), but they would be much smaller than this sky scraper of an ad.



PHOTOS BY MARJORIE BEGGS

Proposition G, approved in 2002 by 78% of the voters, prohibits new general advertising city-wide.

“General advertising” refers to goods or services not sold where the ads are displayed — think a Verizon ad on the Grant Building. Business service advertising, like an iPod ad on an Apple store, isn’t regulated by the two billboard laws or Prop. D. Marquees and other historical signs also are outside the purview of Prop. D and are, in fact, encouraged by an ordinance passed last year.

As the election nears, Addington, Diamond



Furniture and Carpets, the store with Greek columns would be a candidate for one or more signs on the street.

now, but if Prop. D passes and we can offer exclusives to advertisers and show the area is a cool and interesting destination with real-time excitement, advertisers might be able to see beyond the idea of impressions.”

He offered some examples of what ads go for: A sign currently up on the Mission Street side of 995 Market brings its property owner \$18,000 a month. One of comparable size in Union Square might generate \$75,000 a month. A glittery, spectacular billboard in Times Square could pull down \$300,000 a month.

FOR AND AGAINST

Addington says he’s talked with the owners of all 52 buildings in the proposed district. “None have reservations about the initiative except Laurie Lazer and Darryl Smith at the Luggage Store [1007 Market] — they’re artists and they have aesthetic concerns.”

Smith told The Extra that he admires Addington’s enthusiasm, but worries whether there will be a lot of schlock on the two blocks. “I won’t actively fight it,” he says, “but I won’t support it either. I’m wary of the ‘artistic presence’ of electronic billboards.”

Lazer added, “We’re such a small city and this idea seems so New York.”

The Yes on Proposition D ballot statement calls the sign district “a community solution” and names the S.F. Democratic Party, Chamber of Commerce, Supervisors Chiu, Alioto-Pier, Elsbernd, Dufty, Campos and Maxwell, plus artists, theaters, residents, business and labor as its supporters. Conspicuously absent is Supe Daly. This is his district, but aide Tom Jackson told The Extra that he’s taken no official position.

Part of the proposed sign district falls within the Tenderloin CBD’s boundaries. Two of its committees reviewed the initiative; one voted to recommend that the full board support it, the other that the full CBD board weigh in with “no recommendation.” The full board votes Sept. 21. SPUR has voted to support the proposition. San Francisco Architectural Heritage has yet to take a stand.

“There is a place for signage in that area,”

Market faces an 'uphill battle'



Columns and classic facade at 1019-21 Market St., building's side if Proposition D passes.

says Jack Gold, Heritage executive director. "We're eager to work more closely on the issue, but we need to move forward cautiously. I know David is looking to restore the cultural vitality of that area, but our members and neighborhood stakeholders have several concerns. Size is one."

The city attorney's office and Department of Building Inspection have written analyses of Prop. D on the Elections Department Website that take no position. The Planning Department's analysis, however, is harsh: The proposed ordinance could affect the "integrity" of Market Street, allowing not only free-standing roof billboards, banned since 1965, but wind signs "such as balloons, ribbons, streamers and signage similar to and including 'dancing inflatable men.'" It doesn't limit the number of billboards per parcel, so if the side of a building is big enough to hold four 500-square-foot billboards, the owner can sell all 2,000 square feet.

Planning also said the initiative could "put the city at risk of legal liability" for regulating the content of signs, which "may be considered an unconstitutional restriction on speech." Plus, the CBD, "a private entity," would assume some of Planning's review and permitting functions, also exposing the city to possible lawsuits.

Addington, attending the Central Market CBD's Aug. 11 board meeting to update members about Prop. D's progress, told them he'd met with planners "who have deep concerns."

CBD board member Joni Marie Theodorsen, artist and manager of Pearl Art & Craft Supplies, wondered if the ordinance interfered with any long-term planning for Market Street.

Addington said it didn't. "Their concern is that it changes the Planning Code and that they weren't properly consulted. But we did what we did because we're not happy with the current plan for these two blocks."

Might dancing, inflatable men really be allowed? a board member asked. Addington said definitely not, because the CBD review subcommittee, which will include Planning, would nix them from the get-go.

"People use the inflatable advertising only when they can't get any other kind of sign permit," he told The Extra later. "We'll be able to do things that are really cool — that are illuminated and digital — so why would we do that?"

Board President Katie O'Brien, development manager for Martin Building Co., pressed for careful crafting of design and attention to preservation with clear controls on signage. The CBD has a reputation to protect, she said.

Addington promised board members that for their next meeting he'd have an initiative master plan, which he's creating with CBD Executive Director Daniel Hurtado, that will cover subcommittee composition, initial funding procedures, contacts with property owners and advertisers, even the possibility of eventually forming a separate nonprofit to administer the district.

'VISUAL POLLUTION'

San Francisco Beautiful says the sign district is a terrible idea. Its No on Proposition D ballot statement envisions "the visual pollution...[of] massive, digital billboards. . .blinking every few seconds, blazing away 24 hours a day."

Executive Director Leigh Ann Baughman told The Extra that anyone walking down the street would be forced to look at general advertising all the time. "It takes away from each individual, without asking." Static billboards are bad enough, but digital ones "are 500 times worse." The city has none now.

She does like the idea of the CBD managing the district and some ad revenues flowing back into the community, but the initiative, she says, is "weakly written" and lacks restrictions. Even now, billboard companies are flaunting general advertising mandates, and she believes a special general advertising district would compound the city's work to keep billboards under control. (See sidebar.)

By late August, others in the "no" camp included South of Market activist Jim Meko, who's running for District 6 supervisor next year and chairs the SoMa Leadership Council, and Michael Nulty, president of Alliance for a Better District 6. Both are opposing as individuals, not as heads of their organizations.

The sign district, Nulty said in an email, is "another special interest measure that silences the average resident's voice," one that excluded people who live in the neighborhood from the process of drafting the ordinance and, he worries, will shut them out of decision-making if it passes.

Meko calls the initiative "ballot-box planning," a "selfish" idea that should have gone instead to the supervisors, who would have held public hearings that also allowed Planning commissioners to weigh in. "Has anyone considered," he asks, "that someday this will be identified as a historic district and future generations will shake their heads at our impudence?"

But for some who live and work in the area, the Mid-Market Special Sign District looks like the best bet to make much-needed changes. Architect William Worthen is a green consultant to the mayor's office, on the board of the S.F. chapter of the American Institute of Architects, owns a condo in Mint Plaza and joined the Central Market CBD board a year ago. He can't think of another two blocks in the city where a special sign district would be more appropriate, he says: "It was an electronically illuminated theater district years ago, and this is a great opportunity to return to that. Also, this is our neighborhood — we have a vested interest in it, so we're going to be careful what goes up."

In two months, Prop. D will go before all the voters, not just mid-Market neighbors. The Extra asked Addington what he would say to the general electorate. "This will enhance

Half reviewed signs are 'illegal'

PLANNING Department Ombudsman Dan Sider probably knows more about billboards than anyone in the city. He heads Planning's GASP (General Advertising Sign Program), which tries to improve enforcement of signage laws. In a year and a half, GASP has identified 1,509 general advertising signs citywide and evaluated more than half of them.

"Forty-seven percent of the signs we reviewed are completely illegal," Sider said. "They had no permit and were required to be removed. Another 23% reviewed were out of compliance with their permit — they were bigger or taller, for example. The rest were legal."

Sider says that building owners and sign companies make so much money, the incentives to violate laws are great. GASP's penalties, keyed to size, also can be great. If an illegal 2,500-square-foot sign isn't removed within 30 days of notice, the responsible party — the building owner and the sign company together — rack up \$2,500 a day in penalties.

Sider says he can't comment on Prop. D or, if it passes, how likely it is that property owners in the sign district would become scofflaws.

GASP has had successes, but at a cost. As of Aug. 3, 227 signs had been removed, and fierce legal challenges are typical, Sider says. The latest GASP report shows total revenues of \$143,425 for the first quarter of fiscal 2008-09, with \$50,000 of that from fines and penalties. Expenditures were \$199,633 for the same period — and \$123,000 of that went to city attorney staff. ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS

the city's reputation," he said.

S.F. Beautiful begs to differ: "San Francisco [residents and] millions of tourists would suffer a commercially blighted skyline."

Or, maybe, it will push the advertising envelope and force the media to be equal to the challenge of the message. In this case, that means bringing the creative urges that are surging in the central city to public awareness. ■



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BART
ba Take BART to The Fringe!
produced by EXIT Theatre

CARY STOWE
A man with friends

Cary Stowe was a happy go-lucky-guy — always up, always said hello, loved to talk about sports — a guy hard to say no to, his friends said at his July 24 memorial service. But he couldn't kick his worst habit, even when he could hardly walk.

"He had emphysema," said Mr. Stowe's neighbor Jon Sollars, a fellow smoker who had quit 14 months earlier, yet still bought off-brand cigarettes to give to anybody who bummed them, mainly Mr. Stowe.

"We used to talk about respiratory issues," Sollars continued. "He had trouble breathing just walking up Eighth Street. The Wednesday (July 8) before he died he came by and he looked ashy. I told him to go to the hospital right away."

SOUTHSIDE

Sollars uses liquid oxygen for his respiratory condition and keeps it handy. That Wednesday, following his daily routine, Mr. Stowe knocked on Sollars' door across the hallway to bum a cigarette. Surprised at the look of him, Sollars could only talk him into taking some of his liquid oxygen along, and then gave him a cigarette.

Mr. Stowe promised Sollars he'd go to the hospital Friday. But he died that day, July 10, in his bed at the 1180 Howard St. Studios. Two residents, who weren't at the memorial, were at his side, friends said. He was 62.

Mr. Stowe was one of the first formerly homeless residents to occupy TNDC's new building six years ago. Sollars, who knew him five years, said he may once have worked for the city before falling on hard times. Manager Van Hedwall said he had sons living in Oakland.

Hedwall recalled that Mr. Stowe, an African American, had spoken up at a building meeting about the race relations struggles of the 1960s and told how he had experienced the changes, giving Hedwall new insights.

"He had no bitterness," Hedwall said. "He was well-liked and had lots of visitors. He always said hello."

Two of Mr. Stowe's female friends arrived late, bereaved and somber.

"I came here and slept on the floor," said the first woman, younger and taller, who said she lives in the Tenderloin. "It was the first place he got. It was good for us. He never missed a month's rent. I knew him ten years."

The other woman knew him longer. "I slept outdoors with him and in a truck," said the second woman, her eyes downcast. "But I found a place to live." She paused. "I'd be so mad at him and turn around do the same thing again for him. No apologies from him, ever."

"Ours was a weird relationship," said the first. "He took care of me, and then it all turned around. We'll definitely miss him."

"Yeah, asking for cigarettes," Sollars said lightly. "I always had a couple. He was never annoying and always appreciated it." ■

—TOM CARTER

DASCHYL LA DAY
Truck driver

He was Dash to his friends and the staff at the Senator Hotel, but Scooter to his family. To all he was pleasant, a joy and uncomplaining, and everyone at his Aug. 20 memorial — his birthday — said they would miss him.

Daschyl La Day died in his room Aug. 9, just 11 days before he would have turned 44.

"He was one of the nicest people I've ever met, always there for others," said Isabella Marshall, the hotel manager.

Among the 20 people gathered to remember Mr. La Day were his mother, Jewel La Day, and two aunts, Iris Jasper and Doris Samuel.

Ms. Samuel recalled the last time she'd seen Mr. La Day. "I'm from Beaumont, Texas, and he called when he was driving through. I asked him to stay the night — so I could spend more time with him — but he said he just wanted to keep on going. He was such a beautiful person."

Mr. La Day was born in Beaumont, moved to California with his family as an infant and graduated from Balboa High School. He and his wife of 10 years had four daughters and four grandchildren.

About four years ago, he moved into the Senator, but he didn't come alone. With him were his two

teenage daughters. Kelly McNeil, his staff counselor at the time, remembers how he said what he wanted most was to make a home for himself and his two children.

"I'm really shocked at his passing," McNeil said, "but I will remember him as a kind man who loved to stop in and talk — though he often did that at 4:58 p.m., just two minutes before I was scheduled to leave."

Mr. La Day's most recent counselor, Jenia Sevillano, recalled how independent he was, but how much he loved his family. "There was real joy on his face when he talked about his children and grandchildren and going on vacation with his mother," Sevillano said. "He told me, 'I do everything with her.'"

Warren Chatman, a Senator resident for 15 years who befriended the much younger Mr. La Day, said going off on trips was important to him. "He always talked about taking vacations. We also talked about arthritis — I have it and he did, too. He was a nice kid."

Marshall said that Mr. La Day had physical problems stemming from vehicle accidents, from the time when he was truck driver. His last job was driving for the Food Bank, before his disabilities made the work too difficult.

"His passing was sudden," Marshall said. "He'd just come back from one of his trips."

The memorial ended with a soulful gospel, "Lord, take my hand and lead your child back home," sung by hotel resident Rita Whittaker. ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS



Ground Zero Poetry Reading

at 21 Club, Taylor & Turk

8 p.m., Wed. Sept. 9

Ed Bowers, emcee

Our goal is simple: to provide San Francisco patients with high quality, affordable medicinal cannabis and related products.

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Majority of robberies within 2 blocks of cop shop

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

and the robber ran off with the iPhone, his backpack that had \$600 rent money in it and his medications, leading to all sorts of difficulties. He made a police report with a good description, he says. "But nothing ever happened. I still see the guy in the

neighborhood."

Surprisingly, up to a third of neighborhood robberies Capt. Gary Jimenez describes in his weekly community newsletter result in arrests. Some are a result of prompt reporting and good descriptions. According to the station's annual report to the Police Commission, average arrival time on the crime scene is 2:35 minutes, 3:21 minutes or 6:51 minutes,

depending on whether the call is rated A (in progress), B or C priority, respectively.

Reports show that robbers tend to hang out in the hood after their dirty work. That's because many live in the Tenderloin, O'Brochta says. Or maybe they're addicts, come into the neighborhood for services and spot an opportunity, then linger in familiar territory. Jimenez's estimate that up to 85% of TL arrests are of out-of-towners doesn't hold for robbers.

"For narcotics, that's certainly true, but not this particular group," says O'Brochta.

O'Brochta's been in the department 15 years, 12 of those in the Tenderloin, and for 10 years on and off in plainclothes, making him a cop regularly in harm's way. He and another sergeant each supervise four officers in the plainclothes division of the Street Crimes unit. They're also known as the Robbery Abatement Team, a special unit begun in 1991 when robbery was more prevalent. One to four times a month they stage vulnerable-looking decoys.

A typical decoy operation will put an officer in distressed clothes and makeup such as a beard or fake bruises and blood. The cop may feign drunkenness or stumbling disorientation, and use a prop such as a beer can, or walker, even a wheelchair. He'll maybe have a wallet showing, or just bills. A concealed surveillance squad monitors from nearby. When a predator strikes, an arrest of team of at least six officers strikes back.

Sometimes the robber fights back.

"We've had injured officers," O'Brochta says. "I've seen the brutality."

If you are coming to the Tenderloin at night to stay until midnight, O'Brochta cautions, be aware of your surroundings and travel in groups.

Robberies may continue to fluctuate but he says there are fewer reported cases now than 15 years ago when the neighborhood was wilder, TL Police Station hadn't been built and the force had fewer cops.

Two years ago, O'Brochta says, there was an unusual trend of mugging pedestrian commuters from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. when witnesses were few. "It was in the Tenderloin and at the edge of it," he said, "Crack addicts were doing it." Bringing in more cops squelched it. ■

MY STORY

Our reporter foils seething mugger

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

came around to my right side and fell into perfect step with me. His left arm went around my left shoulder. I figured it was someone I knew or someone who knew me as a neighborhood newspaper reporter and had something to say.

But it seemed strange and he was just a blur at my side when I felt something pointed and hard jam against my right ribs, concealed by his coat. It felt like a knuckle. "Got any money?" he growled. I hadn't looked at him. It happened in blinding speed, three seconds, maybe four.

I didn't think, just reacted. I spun off his arm toward the wall, whirling to face him, knees slightly bent and leaning forward, the ready position in tennis to receive a serve. The wall now at my back and he in front of me, I was rapped by this 5-foot-9 Latino of medium build in a light gray hoodie that fell a foot below his waist. He wore baggy denim pants and was in his late 20s, early 30s. He reset to face me, too, and was hunched forward, arms spread and ready to grab me if I bolted.

His eyes were smoldering dark pools of hate, like nothing I'd ever seen. I was chilled by them, but not dumbfounded.

At once I feigned a move to the right with my shoulders to check his reaction. He shuffled to adjust, but not very fast, and I knew all I needed to know. Then I did the double I used against the fastest guards in high school — small fake to the left, big fake to the right, then the full burst back to

the left — and I was around him untouched and through the parked cars. "Leave that man alone!" a black woman in the crowd yelled. I was way out in the street and hearing no trailing footsteps and knew before I looked back that I'd smoked him.

I kept jogging down the street and took a reassuring glance back before pulling up and sauntering across the intersection. Looking back, I saw him at the edge of the crowd, not disappearing or fading into it but fixed, staring back at me, daring me to return.

My heart was still racing when it dawned on me how I had dropped my guard. I had been overconfident and preoccupied. I hadn't even looked at the crowd as I swept through it. Sloppy.

The store owner had already left for the meeting so I went on to the station, but without retracing my steps. It was a busy meeting, and I had no time to process the ordeal. Bottom line was I felt I had just run away from some guy and so what? Still, the potential danger and risk made an interesting story of peril that I wasted no time the next day detailing to some of The Extra's staff. At one point, I demonstrated the double fake.

Their attentiveness and knotted foreheads told of their concern for my safety. They asked if I had filed a police report. I said no. That didn't sit well and I was lectured on "the right thing to do." I agreed.

"What if he had a gun?" asked a reporter.

I stared blankly at her.

The next day I added a second personal rule: Review the first rule daily. ■



BOEDDEKER PARK IMPROVEMENTS

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) is partnering with the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department to help improve Boeddeker Park.

WE NEED YOU!

Tell us what would make the park a better place.

PLEASE JOIN US:

SEPTEMBER 16, 2009 (Wed), 5:30-7:00pm
OCTOBER 3, 2009 (Sat), 11:00am-12:30pm
OCTOBER 20, 2009 (Tues), 3:30-5:00pm

LOCATION: Boeddeker Park Clubhouse
240 Eddy Street

FOR MORE INFORMATION



Please contact Jennifer Worth of The Trust for Public Land at (415) 495-5660 x386 or jennifer.worth@tpl.org, or Marvin Yee of the SF Recreation and Park Department at (415) 581-2541 or marvin.yee@sfgov.org.



City and County of San Francisco
Recreation and Parks Department

Rock out at a Ban(ne)d Books Week event



San Francisco Public Library

Have Lunch with the Banned!

SF Main Library, Larkin Street steps
Thursday October 1, 2009, Noon-1:30 p.m.

Join Bay Area writers and musicians including Frank Portman, Jack Boulware, Kathi Kamen Goldmark, Ben Fong-Torres, Penelope Houston, Patricio Johnson, Richie Unterberger, Roy Zimmerman, emcee Jewelle Gomez and more.

Celebrate the freedom for everyone to read what they want—and rock out as they wish—at a lunchtime music-themed Ban(ne)d Books reading and performance on the Larkin Street steps of the Main Library

American Library Association
Banned Books Week
Sept. 26-Oct. 3, 2009

FRIENDS of the
SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY



COMMUNITY CALENDAR

SPECIAL EVENTS

Public meetings to discuss recommendations for spending \$8 million on Boeddeker Park improvements by Trust of Public Land: Sept. 16, 5:30-7 p.m.; Oct. 3, 11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; Oct. 20, 3:30-5 p.m., all at the Boeddeker Clubhouse. Contact: Meghan Peccaut 495-5660 x 531.

Community meeting and presentation on California Pacific Medical Center's Cathedral Hill Campus (Geary and Van Ness), Wed., Sept. 9, 6 p.m., 201 Turk community room, Refreshments and door prizes. Co-sponsored by a coalition of community groups.

Positively 6th Street Fair, Sat., Sept. 19, 11 a.m.- 4 p.m., Stevenson Alley between 6th and 7th streets. Live music, dance and cultural performances, children's play area, family activities, food, community information tables and booths, free health and social services, employment assistance. Info: positively6thstreetfair.org. To volunteer: Meital Amitai, 538-8100, ext. 202

ART EVENTS

2009 Fringe Festival, EXIT Theatre's 18th annual showcase of 41 performances, runs Sept. 9-20. For play descriptions, tix, locations, dates and times: sffringe.org.

Concert at Boeddeker Park. Jazz by Mel and "The Mellotones," Wed., Sept. 16, noon-1 p.m. Concerts made possible by TL Benefit District's \$1,500 grant to Friends of Boeddeker Park.

Park(ing) Day, an impromptu community garden in front of Central City Hospitality House's arts studio, Sept. 18, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., 290 Turk. Features recordings from Tender Transmissions, an aural network of recordings from Tenderloin residents. Info: Niki Savage, 741-2133.

COMMUNITY: REGULAR SCHEDULE HOUSING

Supportive Housing Network, 3rd Thursday of the month, 3-5 p.m., location TBA. Contact: Kendra Fuller, 421-2926 x304.

Tenant Associations Coalition of San Francisco, 1st Wednesday of the month, noon, 201 Turk, Community Room. Contact Michael Nulty, 339-8327. Resident unity, leadership training.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

CBHS Consumer Council, 3rd Monday of the month, 5-7 p.m., CBHS, 1380 Howard, room 537. Call: 255-3695. Advisory group of consumers from self-help organizations and other mental health consumer advocates. Open to the public.

Health & Wellness Action Advocates, 1st Tuesday of the month, 5-7 p.m., Mental Health Assoc., 870 Market, Suite 928. 421-2926 x306.

Healthcare Action Team, 2nd Wednesday of the month, Quaker Center, 65 Ninth St., noon-1:30 p.m. Focus on increasing supportive home and community-based services, expanded eligibility for home care and improved discharge planning. Light lunch served. Call James Chionsini, 703-0188 x304.

Hoarders and Clutterers Support Group, Mental Health Association, 870 Market, Suite 928. Call for dates and times: 421-2926 x306.

Mental Health Board, 2nd Wednesday of the month, 6:30-8:30 p.m., City Hall, room 278. CBHS advisory committee, open to the public. Call: 255-3474.

National Alliance for the Mentally III-S.F., 3rd Wednesday of the month, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Family Service Agency, 1010 Gough, 5th Fl. Call: 905-6264. Family member group, open to the public.

SAFETY

Safety for Women in the Tenderloin, every 3rd Wednesday, Central City SRO Collaborative, 449 Turk St., 4-6 p.m. Informal, friendly environment, refreshments, gender sensitive to LGBTQ community and sex workers. Discuss how to make Tenderloin SROs safer for women. Information: Alexandra Goldman, volunteer campaign coordinator, 775-7110 x102.

Neighborhood Emergency Response Team Training (NERT). Central city residents can take the S.F. Fire Department's free disaster preparedness and response training at neighborhood locations. See www.sfgov.org/sffdnert, or call Lt. Arteseros, 970-2022.

SoMa Police Community Relations Forum, 4th Monday of the month, 6-7:30 p.m. Location varies. To receive monthly e-mail info: Meital Amitai, 538-8100 x202 or mamitai@iisf.org.

Tenderloin Police Station Community Meeting, last Tuesday of the month, 6 p.m., police station Community Room, 301 Eddy. Call Susa Black, 345-7300. Neighborhood safety.

Boeddeker Park cleanup, 3rd Saturday of the month, 9-noon, organized by the Friends of Boeddeker Park. To RSVP to work or for information, call Betty Traynor, 931-1126.

Central City Democrats, meets four times a year, 301 Eddy St. Community Room. Information: 339-VOTE (8683) or centralcitydemocrats@yahoo.com.

Central Market Community Benefit District, board meets 2nd Tuesday of the month, 989 Market St., 3rd Fl., 3 p.m. Information: 882-3088, <http://central-market.org>.

Community Leadership Alliance. Monthly meetings and informational forums, Tenderloin Police Station community room. David Villa-Lobos, admin@communityleadershipalliance.net.

Friends of Boeddeker Park, 2nd Thursday of the month, 3:30 p.m., Boeddeker Rec Center, 240 Eddy. Plan park events, activities and improvements. Contact Betty Traynor, 931-1126.

Gene Friend Recreation Center Advisory Board, 3rd Thursday of the month, 5 p.m. Board works to protect SoMa resources for children, youth, families and adults. Gene Friend Recreation Center, 270 Sixth St. Information: 538-8100 x202.

North of Market Planning Coalition, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 6 p.m., 301 Eddy. Neighborhood planning. Info: 820-1412.

North of Market/Tenderloin Community Benefit District. Call District Manager Elaine Zamora for times and dates, 292-4812.

SoMa Leadership Council, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 6 p.m., The Arc, 1500 Howard St. at 11th. Emphasizes good planning and good government to maintain a diverse, vibrant, complete neighborhood. Contact: Jim Meko, 624-4309 or jim.meko@comcast.net.

South of Market Project Area Committee, 3rd Monday of the month, 6 p.m., 1035 Folsom, between 6th & 7th sts. Health, Safety and Human Services Committee meets monthly on the first Tuesday after the first Monday, 1035 Folsom, noon. Information: 487-2166 or www.sompac.com.

Tenderloin Futures Collaborative, 2nd Wednesday of the month, 10 a.m., Tenderloin Police Station community room, 301 Eddy. Call 358-3956 for information. Network of residents, nonprofits and businesses taking on neighborhood development issues.

SENIORS AND DISABLED

Mayor's Disability Council, 3rd Friday of the month, 1-3 p.m., City Hall, room 400. Call: 554-6789. Open to the public.

Senior Action Network, general meeting, second Thursday, 10 a.m.-noon, St. Mary's Cathedral. Monthly committee meetings, 965 Mission #700: Pedestrian Safety, third Wednesday, 10 a.m.; Senior Housing Action, third Wednesday, 1:30; Information: 546-1333 and www.senioractionnetwork.org.

NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT

Alliance for a Better District 6, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 6 p.m., 230 Eddy. Contact Michael Nulty, 820-1560 or sf_district6@yahoo.com, a districtwide improvement association.



Grand Liquors

a family business in this neighborhood
for over 20 years
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Tip Top Grocery Market



Please support us and our transfer.
We love our neighborhood and
we want to stay.

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Tip Top Grocery Market at 90 Turk.





You are invited

Community Meeting

Wednesday, September 9, 2009 at 6PM

201 Turk Street, Community Room

Presentation on:
**California Pacific Medical Center's
Cathedral Hill Campus
at Geary & Van Ness Avenue**

Refreshments provided
Arrive Early
Door Prizes

Co-Sponsored by: Alliance for a Better District 6, Bay Area Women's and Children's Center, Black Brothers Esteem, Central City SRO Collaborative, Curry Senior Center, The Green Door, La Voz Latina, Market Street Association, MacCanDo Tenderloin Youth Track Club, Rincon Hill Neighborhood Association, San Francisco Network Ministries, Senior Action Network, SoMa Leadership Council, Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, Tenant Associations Coalition of San Francisco, Youth with a Mission, 222 Hyde, and 509 Cultural Center

