

# Brown flip-flops, sees crisis in GG Park

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Sets forth  
no-tolerance policy  
for lawbreakers;  
crackdown includes  
heat-seeking copters

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In an uncharacteristic about-face, Mayor Brown says the outlaw camping and drug use in Golden Gate Park is "now clearly a crisis," and he has called for such dramatic measures as using airborne heat-seeking equipment to ferret out campgrounds and implementing a zero-tolerance policy for chronic offenders.

Brown's suggestions — which if enacted would in many ways go further than former Mayor Frank Jordan's controversial Matrix program — were met with scorn by civil rights activists, who said homeless people would be unfairly targeted.

Brown said the crackdown would not single out the homeless, only lawbreakers.

"It is at the point where serious offenders are occupying spaces in places and not allowing you and I, ordinary citizens, to share those

[ See PARK, A-18 ]



## Brown reverses stance on park

spaces and places except through great danger," Brown said Wednesday.

Brown convened an emergency meeting Wednesday with District Attorney Terence Hallinan and police brass to see what, if any, new approaches could and should be undertaken.

The always liberal Hallinan vowed to get tough: "No Mr. Nice Guy," he said of his new stance.

He said he would see what could be done about upgrading some nuisance offenses from infractions to misdemeanors, which carry the possibility of jail time.

"We're going to increase the pressure," Hallinan said. "We'll make it so uncomfortable they have to leave."

As Brown and other officials were discussing what to do about the deplorable conditions in the park, crews from the park department conducted a massive clean-up of several illegal encampments. They confiscated and hauled away truckloads of materials after telling the campers how and where they could reclaim their property.

The meeting came the same day that Brown's handpicked chief of the Recreation and Park Department, Joel Robinson, handed in his resignation for not keeping the mayor accurately apprised of the park's conditions. As of late Wednesday, Robinson was still on the job, and Brown had not decided whether to accept the resignation. The mayor suggested that Robinson would stay on: "Mr. Robinson is doing his job as best in my opinion that it can be done."

A day earlier, Brown chastised reporters for coverage he said was exaggerating the problems in the park and scaring away many people. "Anyone using common sense in Golden Gate Park is safe," an angry Brown said Tuesday.

### Caught off-guard

Wednesday, he apologized and reversed course. The impetus: He was caught off-guard on a TV newscast Tuesday night in which he was providing election commentary. The anchor cut away to a live report in Golden Gate Park in which a reporter was interviewing people camping illegally in the park and talking about using drugs there. Brown, who said he was assured by Robinson in the past week that there were no more campers in the park, was livid.

"I'd like to erase my representations made yesterday, No. 1," Brown said. "No. 2, from what I now know, I'm not sure that under the present set of circumstances, and with all the tolerance that has preceded it, that it's possible in a very short period of time to reverse the culture of what has occurred in the park."

Robinson said Wednesday that he had a misunderstanding with Brown over what constituted an encampment. Brown's idea is

much broader than the legal definition, which calls for some evidence that shows an intent to camp, such as a tent or another semipermanent structure.

Said Brown, "I maintain that encampments can be my and your bedroll, my and your setting up housekeeping in the park without a lean-to."

ACLU attorney John Crew, who focuses on police conduct and policies, said Brown's approach would single out homeless people and, in effect, go after a group of people based on their status.

"It is ... an offense to construct or maintain structures that can be used for housing accommodations or camping," Crew said. "But just because some people have political motivation to make it a crime to possess a sleeping bag doesn't make it so."

### New policies

Brown, in consultation with the district attorney, police chief and others, called for the immediate adoption of measures to go after illegal campers and other lawbreakers.

Among them:

► He wants to borrow from the Oakland Police Department a helicopter that's equipped with heat-seeking equipment, to fly over the park and map out homeless encampments. From there, police and park workers on the ground would move in and dismantle them.

► People who are busted three or four times for illegal camping would be declared a public nuisance, at which point a court order would be sought to keep those individuals from setting foot in Golden Gate Park without risk of arrest.

Police Chief Fred Lau said a similar use of public nuisance declarations had kept drug dealers and prostitutes out of certain areas.

Hallinan said he was not ready to embrace that proposal, but was willing to consider it further.

► An end to the policy, implemented before Brown took office, that gave illegal campers 72 hours' notice to clear out in order to allow for social workers and health care workers to conduct outreach.

"If I'm a panhandler and a bad guy, (and) you give me 72 hours, I will not be like Richard Nixon," Brown said. "I will not have any evidence that I've ever been there in 72 hours. ... I'm gone. If you're violating the law, you ought to be busted. Period."

► City officials will scramble to add another 80 or so beds to the emergency shelter system by week's end. Hallinan said he wanted to make sure that people had an alternative before he went out of the way to prosecute them for making the park home.

In addition, the Recreation and Park Department set up a hot line Wednesday to field tips of illegal activity in the park. The number is (415) 831-2783.

"You tell me where the camp is, and in 24 hours it won't be there," Brown vowed.

Shortly after 4 a.m. Thursday, police swept through the eastern portion of the park and cited approximately a dozen people for sleeping in the park. Sleeping in any city park is prohibited between 11 p.m. and 10 a.m.

Last Friday, Brown asked state and federal law enforcement agencies to help local authorities go after alleged drug users in the park.

Brown said his package had a clear goal in mind.

"I want Golden Gate Park and every other park in this city free and clear for any child, any adult or any person to use that park without fear of stepping on a needle, without bumping into some mugger, without being exposed to anything that generates fear," he said. "That's what I am pursuing. Period."

"And all of these funny rules that people have been applying in the past have no application to me."

### Potential opponents

His new zealotry may touch off an all-out war with homeless advocates, who although critical of the mayor during much of his nearly two-year tenure, have treated him gingerly compared with his predecessor.

Mayor Jordan concentrated heavily on enforcing anti-nuisance laws and trying to tighten controls on welfare recipients. During his administration, opponents waged regular anti-Jordan rallies, filed lawsuits and tried to block his plans with legislation carried by those on the Board of Supervisors sympathetic to their cause.

Jordan said Wednesday that the political resistance had stymied his efforts.

"Now, it will be interesting to see what Brown will do," Jordan said.

Bruce Lyall, president of the Haight Ashbury Improvement Association, has long called for The City to take tougher action against illegal park activity.

"I love it," Lyall declared. "I wholeheartedly, absolutely, totally support the mayor's effort to clean up the park. I think it's a civic outrage to have the park turned over to a group of people who are not bound by the same laws as the rest of society."

Paul Boden, director of the Coalition on Homelessness, said Brown's reaction was out of line. He said that the problems had been blown out of proportion and that the response was nothing short of an unmerited attack on a vulnerable homeless population.

"This is similar to what happened in the 1930s, when people were pissed off about homelessness and blamed homeless people," Boden said. "The difference is that back then, the federal government set up camps to protect the homeless from local authorities — from exactly what local authorities in San Francisco are talking about doing now."

Kathleen Sullivan and Gregory Lewis of The Examiner staff contributed to this report.