


**KEN GARCIA**

# Another SOS From The Haight

City Hall ignores repeated complaints about crime

On Haight Street, as in space, no one can hear you scream.

How else to explain the indifference and inactivity on the part of the mayor, the Board of Supervisors, the district attorney and a host of other city officials to the obvious problems affecting one of San Francisco's fabled streets?

For years now, neighborhood residents and merchants have been pleading with the powers that be to address the mounting problems in the Haight — concerns that seem to have registered only last week after an alleged hate crime attack against two black couples by a dozen white youths.

But the attack was just a high-profile and possibly mischaracterized example of the daily plight faced by people in the neighborhood, folks who have frankly grown weary of complaining about the scores of young run-aways and street people who openly deal drugs, drink, trash the neighborhood and maintain a threatening presence on the street.

"In the 20 years I've been here, Haight Street has never looked worse," said John Hooper, a member of the Buena Vista Neighborhood Association. "It has gone from exciting and cutting-edge to ominous and dangerous. And we are not getting what we need from the city. We are getting no response."

An extended walk down Haight Street would be enough to raise the eyebrows of any concerned citizen, except it seems, the elected ostriches down at City Hall. It appears that only they could be oblivious to the public urinating, aggressive panhandling and vandalism that occurs in broad daylight — a Third World scene that gets rougher after dark.

Even the most compassionate denizens of the area are complaining about the state of the Haight. Brian Gaines, a member of the city's Human Services Commission who owns the Ben & Jerry's ice cream store at Haight and Ashbury, said the neighborhood has steadily gotten out of hand.

"It's clear that no matter how much we try to be nice to these kids that they don't have a lot of respect for people who live and work in the neighborhood," he said. "We have to paint our building two to three times a week and we've had to replace several sets of windows. It's gotten to the point where neighborhood people are afraid to walk on the street, and that doesn't bode well for the businesses here."

Residents point to the proliferation of social service agencies in the Haight as one of the reasons so many wayward youths flock to the area. The Haight has more than 65 medical, counseling, drug treatment, outreach and rehabilitation centers — which many residential and commercial organizations say is more than one neighborhood can absorb.

Neighborhood groups have joined forces to block a plan by the Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic to expand its services to the old Christian Science church across from Buena Vista Park, and merchants have begun pressuring the Planning Department to investi-

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gate the proliferation of treatment programs illegally run out of residential buildings.

But the open drug dealing has gotten so bad that even civil libertarian groups like the Haight Ashbury Neighborhood Council have asked police to step up their presence.

Yet more police patrols haven't proved a deterrent to the nomadic tribes that drift around the street. Privately, police officials say all the citations they issue for drinking, drug dealing and other offenses somehow "disappear" by the time they reach the Municipal Court system. One officer told me it was a "pretty egregious example" of ticket fixing — and blamed it on the clout of so-called homeless "advocates" down at City Hall.

But as residents in the Haight know, the problems are not about homelessness. They're about crime.

"All I know is that all the citations we issue don't mean much to the kids we're issuing them to," said Captain John Newlin of Park Police Station. "And if these people believe they're not going to be found responsible for their actions, why should they change their behavior?"

Even the alleged hate crime attack has raised questions about the stance of some city officials. Word on the street — and among some

police investigators — is that the assault was really a retaliation against a known drug dealer who had a history of ripping off gutter punks in the area.

Yet because the alleged assailant, Charles McDavid, yelled racial slurs and the assault involved whites against blacks, District Attorney Terence Hallinan and Police Chief Fred Lau have maintained that the incident was a hate crime — and prosecutors filed six hate crime penalty enhancement charges along with the other felony assault charges.

Beyond the one publicized case, though, the only response to the neighborhood's demise from the folks at Van Ness Avenue has been to call for more meetings. That's the kind of leadership we've come to expect in San Francisco, and why the Haight is a sorry mess today.

"I'm fed up with the city not doing anything about it, with not enforcing its own laws," said Ruth Dorsey, a Haight resident for 25 years. "We have a small percentage of people ruining the quality of life in this neighborhood, and it's gotten so bad that I don't even like to walk the streets at night. I consider myself a tolerant person, but now I'm getting angry."

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