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PHOTO: RORY McNAMARA

STREET SCENE: Some residents believe the Haight is already saturated with social-service programs.

Haight Ashbury groups at odds over homeless 'way station' proposal

By Sonia Mansfield
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORTER

Two Haight-Ashbury neighborhood groups are fighting over a proposal to set up a social services center in their neighborhood.

The proposed center would be a way station, a one-stop help center that would provide the homeless with access to showers, bathrooms, and storage facilities, and would refer them to other facilities that offer lodging, meals, employment referrals, transit, and medical-treatment facilities.

Members of the neighborhood group Residents Against Druggies (RAD) claim the way station will be a full-service homeless shelter, and they say that, since the neighborhood already houses several care programs, other neigh-

borhoods should take some of the responsibility of housing these programs.

"We're going to get to the point where we are actually a ghetto," said Joe Konopka, president of RAD. "The city is just dumping everything on us. We are a dumping ground and that's not fair to our neighborhood and it's not fair to the people who need the services."

"We've never proposed a shelter"

However, Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood Council (HANC) president Flip Sarrow said Konopka has misled RAD members and that the way station will not be a full-service shelter, but only a referral service.

"I think they are very misin-

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formed. Sometimes I think they are purposely misinformed," said Sarrow. "The way-station proposal has never been a shelter as far as housing people or having people stay the night. It's mostly referrals. I've told this to Joe Konopka several times. He uses the word 'shelter' because it scares people. We've never proposed a shelter."

In order to clear up what he characterized as misconceptions about the proposal, Sarrow attempted to speak at a RAD meeting last week, but was told he couldn't speak because it was a RAD meeting, not a HANC meeting. RAD members in the audience also got angry and asked Sarrow to leave. Sarrow said that Konopka has always been allowed to speak at HANC meetings and was surprised that the same courtesy was not extended to him.

"I feel sad that we couldn't at least discuss some things. There was no room for discussion," said Sarrow. "I knew people would probably be upset about the way station, but I didn't expect this reaction. I thought we could at least talk."

Last week, Konopka began organizing RAD members in a campaign to stop the way station. He provided members with postcards and phone numbers, encouraging them to tell the city about their opposition to the way station.

Terry Hill from the Mayor's office on Homelessness said his office is very anxious to hear feedback. However, he said, no single neighbor-

entire neighborhood," said Hill. "But in no way is this a done deal. Right now, it is just a proposal."

Both Hill and Sarrow are awaiting the results of a survey conducted by HANC and the city, which asked a random sample of residents in the Haight-Ashbury

neighborhood if they support the way station proposal. The results will be released next week.

Hill said if the city considers moving forward on the way station, it will hold a series of community meetings for people to express their views. ■