

Police and Community Review

Problems Posed by Transients 30th and University

Summary

Community members, business partners and police have observed and experienced problems associated with the homeless in North Park for sometime. Specifically, the visual blight caused by transient persons has been a pronounced problem. The problems are a source of irritation as residents and customers have expressed concern regarding offensive behavior and personal safety.

Over the past year (2006) police responded to 1,355 calls for service within 1/10 of a mile of 30th and University. Within 2/10 of a mile of 30th and University officers conducted 694 Field Interviews, wrote 431 citations, made 261 arrests, and took more than 202 crime reports in the year from April 1, 2006 to April 1, 2007. Sixty-nine (69) of those reports involved crimes against persons, including 18 robberies. In 2006, North Park ranked 43rd of the city's 121 neighborhoods in per capita crimes. (1,760 crimes) There were 5.85 violent crimes and 38.46 property crimes per 1,000 residents.¹

On April 4, 2007, police personnel, community members and community activists walked through the neighborhood, studying the environment, looking for opportunities to reduce crime. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) experts Ted Parker and Dave Vincent assisted by providing a post walkthrough review of the area, which is included as Addendum A.

As a result of observations made during the walkthrough, CPTED experts and police make the following suggestions to reduce problems and manage crime and disorder associated with the homeless population. This disorder is caused in part by transient persons living in or frequenting this area.

It is clearly understood that social service and non-profit organizations must be brought to bear on this problem to affect a long-term solution. While enforcement has been and continues to be stiff, it was not considered as the solution for the purposes of this report.

Informal interviews conducted with the homeless identify three reasons they prefer North Park.

- Ability to earn income through panhandling and collecting recyclables.
 - A population easily intimidated
 - Opportunity for theft
- Availability of food from citizens and restaurants
- Access to alcohol and drugs

¹ Anne Carter, SDCPD Crime Analysis Unit and CPTED Review

The Problem:

Homelessness is an historic problem in the North Park Community. Residents complain about urinating, defecating, litter, aggressive panhandling, open air drug dealing, theft, abandoned shopping carts, stolen shopping carts, street robberies, encampments, crowding, and these mentally unstable persons causing disturbances.

It is not the intent of the work group to solve the sociological problem of homelessness. That is a policy and private institution responsibility, well beyond the scope of this report or the activities of the police.

Analysis:

Statistical Data:

San Diego Police have contacted over 2,300 persons in the North Park/Hillcrest area who list themselves as transient. This number may be deceiving, as criminals frequently don't want to tell police where they live for fear of being arrested at a later date. Others give addresses of well known homeless shelters such as Father Joe's. Also, many may not have a permanent residence but sleep in one of a few homes on a regular basis. Of the 2,300 police contacts, 258 were contacted four or more times. An additional 450 were contacted three times.

Police conducted a sample background check of transients and found the following:

- 48% had prior arrests for violent crimes (Felony and Misdemeanor)
- 13% had been institutionalized in a mental health facility for being a danger
 - 48% had been evaluated by police as a danger to them selves or others
- 70% were drug dependent, almost all were alcohol dependent

28 transients had Stay Away Orders (SAO's) issued by the court because of prior arrests.²

Current Research:

There are numerous published papers on homelessness. Most solutions have centered on social services. There are three projects of note, one in Fontana California that focused primarily on providing services such as transitional housing and job training; one in London England (www.sheltercymru.org.uk) was a comprehensive survey of transients and the other a Ft. Lauderdale Florida effort was resource related as well. They helped to provide medicine to the mentally ill.

² Defendants agree to stay away orders as part of their sentencing. It prohibits them from entering a geographical location for a determined period of time.

San Diego has two established projects that mirror these programs. One is the Serial Inebriate Program (SIP) and the other the Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). Both programs have minimized the impact of the homeless on the community. That is, those who will accept help. ***Most of the people who are problematic at 30th and University and the subject of this effort refuse help or housing.***

Calls for Service Data:

There were 1,355 calls for service in 2006 within 1/10th of a mile of 30th and University. Those calls accounted for 1,164 hours of out of service time. Minimally 200 calls were specifically transient related (Its hard to accurately estimate as they could offend in almost any category). Only 22 calls were for illegal lodging, many of those self-initiated by patrol officers.

Walkthrough Observations: (CPTED):

Community members and police officials made the following observations:

There are pockets of disorder in the neighborhood. Disorder creates a level of comfort to criminal transients and a magnet for crime. Disorder is a "Broken Window" that if left unattended creates a cyclic downward spiral.

Examples of the "Broken Window":

- Trash and litter on the side streets and alleys
- Building awnings and facades in poor condition
- Burned-out shell of a building
- Alleys are used as toilets by transients. The stench of urine and remains of human feces exists in many places.
- Unwanted articles are left in alleys and behind stores that collect items for resale

Other Problems Include:

- Open alcoves at business entrances that provide shelter for transients
- Unsecured trashcans and dumpsters left on the street
- Sidewalk benches that provide a place for transients to loiter, panhandle, drink, and smoke
- Sale of alcoholic beverages to transients
- Sale of controlled substances to transients and others, mainly in the alleys
- Graffiti on buildings in alleys
- Water pipe and electrical box coverings provide places for transients to sit and loiter.
- Electrical boxes painted in graffiti-like patterns
- Shopping carts clog some sidewalks. (It was discovered that Big Lots redeems shopping carts for \$16 each from CSCRC, a shopping cart retrieval vendor. However, none of the carts belong to Big Lots.)

- Transients use the shopping carts to move recyclables, personal belongings, and hide weapons and illegal substances.
- Stores along the University Avenue corridor sell alcohol to transients.
- Drug dealers sell controlled substances to several people including transients in the alleys.
- Water pipe and electrical box coverings are large and provide a location for people to sit and loiter. They are often marred with graffiti.

Solutions:

Solutions to the transient problem will require actions by both the SDPD and the community. Implementation of any or all of the suggestions is discretionary and should be based on time, expense and effort. Implementation of suggestions should be prioritized based on the level of commitment (time and money) and the level of anticipated effectiveness.

- ***Increase the Effort***
 - Seize shopping carts from transients and affix them to stationary objects for owner retrieval
 - Lock discarded carts to poles for cart retrieval company
 - Secure carts at shopping locations or store them indoors
 - Caution businesses from selling luggage carts to the homeless
 - Lock side yards, garages and homes to reduce theft
 - Lock dumpsters and trash cans
 - Put recyclables out only on the day of pick-up
- ***Increase the Risk To Offenders***
 - Increase crime reporting to police (531-2000)
 - Sign letters authorizing police to enforce trespass laws on private property
 - Install cameras at points of sensitive crime locations
 - Learn the names of transients to remove anonymity
 - Post signs concerning shopping cart removal per 22435.1 B&P
 - Install shopping cart disabling mechanisms
 - Obtain TRO's or Stay away orders (SAO) for those creating problems
 - Community members can obtain (TRO) temporary Restraining Orders through the courts. A SAO is a part of sentencing and is obtained by the City Attorney.
- ***Reduce Attractions/Rewards***
 - Remove all unmonitored and uncontrolled benches, especially ones that crowd the sidewalk or create congestion
 - Remove benches dominated by transients
 - Make all benches uncomfortable by installing armrests or caps
 - Prohibit smoking at bus benches
 - Prohibit smoking in heavily congested pedestrian locations (new law)
 - Gate alcoves to buildings to prevent sleepers
 - Install bright lights along buildings and in alcoves

- Water plants in the alcoves random times, day and night
- Make impossible to sit in planters through removal or design
- Make all water, electrical and other utility covers an uncomfortable place to sit
- Immediately clean graffiti
- Educate businesses and community members about what attracts transients to the community, demand they stop feeding them
- Clean side streets and alleys (guard service vs. cleaning service, community clean up. Businesses could take responsibility for cleaning adjacent parking spaces on side streets.)
- **Reduce Provocations/Eliminate Disorder**
 - Prohibit liquor sales to chronic alcoholics and transients
 - Eliminate sale of small bottles of liquor
 - Eliminate single beer or 40oz sales
 - Fix community disrepair (community clean up)
 - Clean side streets and alleyways
 - Clean areas where feces and urine are located
 - Repair buildings in disrepair
 - Fence areas where dumping is frequent
 - Raze abandoned building and fence vacant lots
 - Change the painting scheme on electrical boxes
 - Remove abandoned cars and increase parking enforcement
- **Remove Excuses**
 - Post signs of “no loitering” or “no trespassing” on private property at sensitive locations
 - Install portable toilets
 - Tell each transient (when safe) the community rules
 - Have transients apply peer pressure to each other
 - Apply pressure to those feeding or giving money to the homeless
 - Warn each liquor establishment of potential litigation
 - Safe Streets Now litigation for those enabling transient activity

Special Recognition:

Sergeant Sharon McNair, Officers John Ampol and Jason Costanza have committed an incredible amount of time, effort and energy into this project. There were also numerous other officers who picked up the slack.

Volunteers Ted Parker, Dave Vincent gave invaluable insight and expertise and their willingness to make this report and project a high priority.

Any questions and or comments can be directed to Lieutenant Mills, 619.692.4860 or amills@pd.sandiego.gov

