

Flawed SRPD Services / Critical Facilities Update

“Neighborhood Speak”-----by Steve Patterson—Federation of SR Neighborhoods

So what’s going on at the San Rafael Police Department? It seems to be a rudderless ship with a throwback leadership that subscribes to a command and control philosophy. We know there is no longer anything that resembles a community policing program, where collaboration, partnership, and relationships drive the interactions between the citizens and the officers. But there is more that is “not” happening, since this mind-set ripples into how the department does business.

Just ask knowledgeable neighborhood leaders about this “state of the union” of relationships at SRPD. Just attending an occasional neighborhood meeting by the PD does not create any connections or relationships. But something is truly missing at the SRPD—a dept without a personality, without a soul, without a community connection. Because of that, there are no collaborative efforts to solve problems related to things like Parks and particularly our Open Space.

In particular, our downtown parks (Boyd/Albert/Gerstle) have been slowed taken over by homeless people. While not necessarily a dangerous or an illegal situation, it is an “unfriendly situation” making it less inviting to moms and children to come and recreate and enjoy tax payer supported destinations. So then, who really owns the parks?

Our Open Space areas are very much unsafe throughout huge sections of San Rafael! Numerous police citations have been issued against homeless encampments (squatters), but most of the homeless encampments are well hidden and difficult to detect (and are illegal) by the understaffed open space SRPD officers. If encampment residents are surprised by hikers, bikers, runners, or others, potentially volatile situations can occur involving physical altercations. In addition, fire risks are greatly increased by the encampments due to camp fire flames and sparks, not to mention the unsanitary conditions that often accompany these homeless havens. Many feel our pristine open space areas have been high jacked and are no longer welcome places to escape and decompress from the stresses of daily life. One must weigh their risk tolerance to such combustible encounters with these invaders before venturing off our city streets and veering into “the bush”.

Why is this tolerated? Who is running the Police department? We have a Chief who is insulated and isolated from his own first-rate rank and file officers, and who has little respect and trust from knowledgeable citizens. When this leader has a bunker mentality, little innovation or progressive actions will occur regarding law enforcement so these conditions just continues to boil and continue to deteriorate.

Most queries to these situations are downplayed and discounted either when concern is expressed or accountability is demanded. It is easier to make citizens wrong rather than to fix these internal personnel or lack of presence issues or to cure the problems that threaten citizens who venture into their Open Space. No collaboration here...!!

Status of SR’s Critical Facilities:

As many know, 15 hard working citizen volunteers appointed by the SR City Council have been studying our critical facilities over the last 18 months. Three challenges existed when they started and remain a delicate balancing act.

- Determine a priority list of facilities (police dept/fire depts/library/community centers) in need of replacement/upgrading
- Educate the public as to the overall conditions of these facilities, both in how they deliver critical

services when functional obsolescence is factored in and how they might withstand a seismic event. These facilities were built in a different era when services delivered were quite different and before seismic earthquake standards.

- Assess what financing options might be available to aid in the effort to replace these aging dated facilities and whether any private/public partnerships possibly exist.

The committee has made tremendous progress and currently polling data of residents in San Rafael is being analyzed to determine how to proceed next. It does seem that the message has gotten out and residents are being made aware of the problem with our dated facilities. This was not always the case in the past and many residents had the mistaken impression that the City of SR's facilities were in good working functional order and seismically safe.

By this summer, a decision will need to be made about whether to put a ballot measure on the November 2009 ballot, and what the scale and scope of the "fix" can be, given the economic challenges that we all face, even in Marin. Timing can be everything, so stay tuned...

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