

Santa Cruz Neighbors General Meeting Minutes
March 20, 2007
7:00-9:00pm
Community Room, Santa Cruz PD

Welcome and Introductions: Deborah Elston opened the meeting and communicated that the next April meeting will be based on Emergency Preparedness. She also said that in the organizing of E. Morrissey neighbors group a crime spree was solved in the process! Tonight's subject is centered on City Homeless Resources, Deborah then introduced guest speakers Ken Cole, Executive Director of Homeless Resource Center, SCPD Officer Eric Seiley, Homeless Resource Officer. Danielle Long, Social worker was not able to attend. Present were Police Dept. Officer Colleen McMahon, SC Neighbors—Mike Bethke, Mary Miller, JD Sotelo and 30 attendees.

Presentations:

Ken Cole—Ken Cole is the Executive Director of the Homeless Resource Center and started in Social Work in the mid 70's. He stated that the Homeless in Santa Cruz is a 'negative' word and that it must begin with Humanity and caring. There are way too many dying homeless. He states that, in a sense, these people are not homeless, the largest provider is the Greenbelt followed by backyards, abandoned autos and behind dumpsters, behind bushes.

A popular misconception is that Santa Cruz is a 'Mecca' for homeless, but he has read the same of San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, etc., they can't all be 'Mecca's' there is only one. He says this to illustrate the point that the homeless problem is everywhere in our nation. Santa Cruz has a paucity of services; we do not have enough services for the homeless regardless of popular opinion. There is no 'comprehensive system—there is a disparity between supply and demand and the next move for the homeless is to opt out of services.

115 Coral St is a focal point for the homeless. He knows that the public can get upset seeing this center but the fact is this place offers or refers assistance for meals, hygiene, postal address service, lockers, and a few counselors to help with mental health or drug dependence.

There is the Homeless Persons Health Clinic, a county program for medical assistance. There is the Family Shelter for up to 28 for 6 months for those that are motivated. There is an 80% success rate in 3-4 months. There is the plain fact that many homeless choose not to live in shelter. There is the River Street Shelter for 40 men and women. There is the Page Smith Community Housing that helps for as long as 18 months.

Eight years ago 115 Coral street was a hodge-podge, now it is a campus that is unique and well thought out and designed.

One factor why Santa Cruz City has more homeless problems is because it is the county seat with courts inside city limits. The courts may release more people who are troubled or on the fringe of society.

Surprisingly he states that there is a lot of "conservative" thinking in homeless circles. With that said many homeless become victims in their homeless world. People with out housing need security, people need safety.

Ken states that he thinks the 3 major contributing factors to this problem of homelessness is 1-Housing costs, 2-Employment, or lack of it, and 3-Healthcare systems that do not work for Mental Health and Substance Abuse.

Ken is not a fan of Panhandling, but if your conscience dictates that you must give to ease it, be safe, don't make it conditional, it doesn't work anyway. And, don't support those in medians, it's not safe and the possibility of receiving a ticket does not help anyone. One thing though, panhandling does cut out the middle man!

What then followed was a lively Q & A. You should have been there!

Officer Seiley—Officer Seiley stated that we all have an opinion and perspective on this problem, there is no one universal solution. Police Department training is not the end all, be all. Some of the best information on this subject is on the web. And we all have experienced homelessness to an extent by experience or relation to it. He does not duplicate that work that Ken Cole does. He has discovered that homeless stereotypes are a microcosm of the city and almost in direct ratio to it. He has been to many cities and Santa Cruz has great system, there's just not enough of it!

The 2000 census placed the homeless population at 1500, it may now be 1800, in a City that itself has a population of 55,000 all in about 12 square miles. And all the homeless services are in the heart of the city.

The homeless individual deficit is mental health, the personal deficit is drug abuse. In his experience of problem solving homeless scenarios there is always a positive and negative view to any circumstance. There are two factors that influence outcomes and that is interaction and free will. Regardless of the condition, there will be at least two ways to look at it.

Officer Seiley then used audience participation and placed us in a real life situation and asked us what were the positives and negatives at each turn in the case. It was interesting to learn that our answers and explanations were reflections of our own individual views there was no right and wrong as far as answers. There were definite consequences to choices made by the principle(s). There was a lot of interaction and discussion during this exercise.

In conclusion Officer Seiley finished up the need for balance in everything, a good look at environmental design. He subscribes to the 'Broken Window Theory', an area that is cared for is a deterrent, if it is not care for it's a magnet for negative activity. And, also the 'Parent Principal', that is all of us are parents.

Communications:

Neighborhood Reports--

Future Meetings:

National Night Out—Tuesday, August 7, 2007, Harvey West Park

Neighborly,
JD