

Public Hysteria Task Force Has 1st Meeting Tonight

The "Public Safety" Task Force, hand-picked by Mayor Hillary Bryant, has its first meeting tonight at 6 PM in the small Tony Hill sideroom at the Civic Auditorium on Church St. across from City Council chambers. According to staff person Scott Collins, the meeting will not be televised, though he intends to bring a small audio recorder. The room accommodates a much smaller number of people than the City Council chambers across the street or the main Civic auditorium assembly room in the same building. It also has no provision for letting folks outside listen via speakers as City Council has. Bryant has politely refused to move either the time or location of the meeting.

HYSTERIA-HEAVY ORIGINS OF THE PUBLIC SAFETY TASK FORCE

The Public Safety Task Force was hastily cobbled together as a patch-up job to respond to the loud criticism of Take Back Santa Cruz and The Clean Team, who came to City Council shaking cans of hypodermic needles they'd picked up over the previous days, weeks, and months.

The fact that they found less than 750 needles in less than half a year compared with the 250,000 reportedly turned in to S.O.S. volunteer Needle Exchange didn't stop City Council from meeting in closed session, closing down all needle exchange in the city limits, and treating this political hysteria as though it were a real public safety concern.

The Clean Team recently was exposed as homeless harassers in a You-Tube video, which disappeared several minutes after it was posted, as CT members denounced and abused homeless people in their sleeping bags, threatened to return and pour water on them, demanded they get up, and clean up the area.

I've stopped waiting for Take Back Santa Cruz to announce it has told its "clean up" crews not to disturb homeless camps as Save Our Shelter folks are reportedly advised in their regular clean-ups along the beaches and river.

NO HOMELESS INVOLVEMENT ON TASK FORCE NOR REAL ACTION TO DEAL WITH TRASH & NEEDLE DISPOSAL

What Council did not do is involve the homeless community in assisting with improper needle distribution, trash dispersal, and real environmental protection.

This could be done by--say--setting up public bathrooms (or at least portapotties) for the 1500-2000 who sleep outside (because there are facilities for less than 50 in the Paul Lee loft for the next six months and a Waiting List of 4-6 weeks), taking seriously Brent Adams' Sanctuary Campground proposal (or something similar), or at least providing trash pick-up's, garbage bags, and clean-up incentives for those who camp of necessity. Instead there's a police hotline to snitch on survival campers, which makes all the more reluctant to be publicly seen hauling trash out of the Pogonip.

REAL AGENDA

Part of the real agenda of Take Back Santa Cruz seems to have always been to treat homeless campers as criminals, drive them out of Santa Cruz, harden the hearts of those who recognize they have rights with venomous rhetoric, and scapegoat them as bums, addicts, drunks, and "foreigners". Out-of-towners with money to throw into shops or lavish at the Boardwalk, of course, regardless of the traffic, trash, and police problems they create are welcome.

The visible poor are falsely blamed and targeted for impeding the escalation of property values and discouraging upscale shopping on Pacific Avenue as well as leaving feces, trash, and needles on (now closed at night) Cowell Beach. Hence in the last two decades we've escalated from the Sleeping Ban to the Sitting Ban, removal of benches (check Walnut Ave. outside of the Silver shop), and massive over-policing and security guard thuggery downtown.

COMPOSITION OF THE INQUISITION

Mostly cops, merchants, and bureaucrats. No homeless folks, homeless advocates, public defenders, and scant social service representation. No surprise, even though Bryant had many to choose from--as can be seen in the list of applicants above.

MAYOR BRYANT'S STONEWALLING CONTINUES

Bryant has continued to stonewall on providing any e-mails for the last year other than 3 "newsletters". The SCPD continues to refused to provide bikes to the bike church with no explanation--from Tina Shull, Assistant City Manager, Council members Don Lane, or Hillary Bryant, whose husband reportedly has a financial arrangement with the Bike Dojo boss--where the SCPD has been sending the bikes. And Council member Posner declines to make any public statements on the matter.

REAL PUBLIC SAFETY IS NOT THE ISSUE: DRIVING AWAY THE HOMELESS IS

Real Public Safety, of course, is being significantly compromised by the SCPD's political anti-homeless agenda of over-policing downtown, engaging in survival-gear-destroying sweeps, & encouraging bigot snitch activity against visible homeless people. Ironically, the data documenting this obvious fact was long unavailable but then supplied in a ham-handed attempt to demonize homeless people.

Public statements from old-time bullies like Deputy-Chief Steve Clark suggesting that nearly half of the police budget goes to address "homeless crime" sounds fearsome until you realize the "crime" he's talking about has been created and magnified by the SCPD. These "crimes" include drug use, urinating, defecating, illegal sleeping, recycling, using shopping carts, open container, and other victimless activities that most people do behind closed doors.

Chief Vogel himself did not deny there was no rise in the "crime rate"--though he willingly accepted the new officer recruit bonuses being thrown at him by City Council in its haste to show it was "doing something".

MORE BACKGROUND

The phony "Public Safety" crisis has spawned a "Task Force" which is likely to escalate rather than dissolve the false issues raised by Take Back Santa Cruz [TBSC] and The Clean Team [TCT]

The Task Force was created in response to TBSC and TCT's manufactured public alarm. This was created by regularly bringing improperly disposed of needles to City Council (less than 800 compared with the 250,000 turned in to Needle Exchange last year) and releasing scare videos of abandoned campsites & fecal debris.

The hysteria created has already prompted City Council to close the City's only Needle Exchange program on Barson St., ironically making more improper needle disposal a near-certainty.

They did this behind closed doors with no public input and no advance notice. No City Council members have acted or made public statements opposing this true Public Safety crisis which City Council itself created.

MISLEADING POLICE CHEER-LEADING

Police officials have signed on to this deception, concealing the fact that there was no rise in crime at the Needle Exchange location & no additional needles improperly disposed of. Chief Vogel and Deputy-Chief Clark have also misled the community by not countering inflammatory nearly-daily Sentinel "crime in our community" stories. The crime rate in Santa Cruz, particularly violent crime, has not risen.

They've also signed on to the "blame the homeless" bedtime story, but neglected to mention that it's the SCPD's own decision to enforce non-crime crimes (like sitting near a building, sleeping, and personal drug use) that have padded these stats.

CITY COUNCIL COVERING ITS OWN FAILURES

Take Back Santa Cruz and the Clean Team have got one thing right: the City has refused to both clean up environmental messes and/or provide the 1500-2000 homeless people who have shelter with campgrounds, trash pickups, Sharps containers, and other obvious sanitary needs.

The Task Force is also designed to cover the ass of the City Council and City Staff and forward the agenda of reactionary Council members Lynn Robinson and Pamela Comstock who seek to "purify" the community by demonizing the homeless and cutting back the pathetically limited homeless services.

Comstock is co-founder of the rabidly anti-homeless TBSC, which poses as a "Public Safety" group.