

Minutes from the October 27, 2010 meeting

**Members present:** Ray Detter, Brian Durrance, Maggie Ladd, Mary Campbell, Peter Ludt, Paul Sher, Maura Thompson, Susan Pollay, Sabra Briere, Daniel Chan representing the Office of Community Development

**Members absent:** Doug Martel (representing the AAPolice), Charles Coleman

**Guests present:** Leslie Stambaugh

Members of the committee and guests briefly introduced themselves and identified the groups and organizations they represented.

**The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as written**

### **Outreach Strategies**

**Ray Detter** described a need to be clear about the nature of the problem. For instance, he indicated that almost all the panhandlers in the State Street area are young people. There are different groups on Main Street and South University. Different types of solutions need to be found.

State Street attracts younger, more aggressive panhandlers who keep moving. They are more professional and don't appear to be drug or alcohol seeking. Others at the table noted that young users may not show the damage of drugs and alcohol, but still be seeking money to acquire more.

Fall is the off season. It's not a good time to go looking for panhandlers. During the summer the State Street area was very busy; there were people who staked out the State Street entrance to Nichols Arcade and ignored the ordinance that said this is not allowed. They were aware that enforcement isn't occurring.

**Brian Durrance** pointed out that At Camp Take Notice there were more young people who seemed very well organized, but they were the ones who brought heroin and other drugs into the camp. Drug use just doesn't show as much until it has been going on for years.

There are two possible solutions: 1) change the ordinance; 2) identify the problem and the location and then find ways outside the ordinance to deal with the problem. Enforcement continues to be an issue. While seasonality is an issue (no one likes to stand around in the cold), panhandlers are here year-round. We need to make certain our residents are educated – whether they are incoming Freshmen at the University or permanent residents.

An effective tool to educate both the public and the panhandlers – and the merchants – continues to be mentioned: educational cards that both outline the ordinance and list places where help is available. The last time, the merchants paid for printing these cards; merchants and police distributed them to panhandlers and the public. When the stock ran low, the merchants turned to the City for funding. By that time, however, there were other options for dealing with street outreach; the panhandling problem was being addressed by increased enforcement of the ordinance, and the City Council chose other priorities. If this solution is pursued, it will have to be as part of a major educational project with clear funding sources.

It may also be necessary to institutionalize the committee, as clearly the problem isn't solved and won't go away.

### **Changing the current ordinance language**

After reviewing the City's ordinance and comparing it to ordinances from other Michigan cities, members of the committee felt the current ordinance language was clear. However, the need to increase enforcement is also clear.

### **Enforcement and education**

Several other ideas were brought forward. Panhandling could be outlawed in the parks – all parks, period. Obstructing sidewalks could be enforced, so pedestrians could feel less intimidated while shopping on Liberty and State. The Street Occupancy permits could require merchants ensure that those sitting at their tables actually be customers.

### **Next Steps:**

A representative from PORT, New Vision, the VA, Ozone House will be invited to attend the November 10 meeting.

### **New Idea**

Leslie Stambaugh offered to conduct a survey of the merchants in the Main Street, State Street, South University and Kerrytown areas. She wanted to help identify fact-based data regarding the impact of panhandling on business and customer-impressions of Ann Arbor's downtown. She asked whether the representatives present would help facilitate this survey. Those present encouraged the survey, but added that residents of downtown and customers should also be surveyed.

Adding these groups may make the survey more difficult to conduct.

### **Next Meeting**

#### **Agenda:**

Discussion will focus on outreach, learning from those organizations involved with the panhandling demographic.

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30 pm, Wednesday, November 10, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room.

Subsequent meeting: 3:30 pm, Wednesday, December 1