

Glover meets with concerned residents
Rick Lemyre
Published 07/03/2008 - 1:14 p.m. PDT

Residents wanting to make their neighborhoods safe again met with District V Supervisor Federal Glover last week to describe their problems and offer some ideas for addressing them.

"There were some good ideas here," Glover said. "I've got to go back and talk with some people at the county and see what we can do next."

More than 50 people from the Lone Tree Glen and Green Hills Circle areas attended the meeting, which began with a listing of what neighbors are enduring from unruly tenants of at least three houses, tenants from two of which receive Section 8 subsidies. The problems include blatant alcohol and drug use, drug dealing, unauthorized tenants (one neighbor reported seeing 10 mattresses set up in one of the house's garage), loud parties and vandalism.

Groups of as many as 30 youths block driveways, loiter and threaten anyone who confronts them. Behavior at one house has resulted in more than 130 calls to police, the neighbors said, while tenants in another have racked up more than 30 police visits in their first 90 days of occupancy.

"I sense (Glover) still thought a lot of this hullabaloo was perhaps coming from fringe (elements) and he had not fully seen that this is legitimate, middle-class outrage," said Walter Ruehlig, a resident of the area who hosted the meeting in his home. "All we want to do is live and let live in peace and safety. Is that too much to ask of our neighbors, the housing authority and the county? None of us moved here to live in the Wild West."

Suggestions for dealing with the problems included:

- Stop the checks. Change Section 8 rules so that landlords whose tenants generate complaints to the police would be required to resolve those complaints before future rent subsidy checks were issued. Similar ideas included fining landlords for excessive police calls to their property, like the way the fines are now levied for repeated false alarms from security systems.
- Use best practices developed elsewhere. One person said that although Monterey has numerous Section 8 recipients, that city does not experience the problems associated with some Section 8 tenants in Antioch. This and other examples of effective housing programs could be used to determine possible changes in the Contra Costa County Housing Authority, which administers the local Section 8 program.
- Establish a standardized process for neighborhood grievance hearings so neighbors can offer input and follow efforts to resolve problems.
- Have better coordination between the housing authority and the city, and encourage housing authority staff to attend City Council meetings and Quality of Life forums.

- Glover should publicly declare his support for the city's efforts, which would include making a statement on the Community Action Team (CAT) activities and a discrimination lawsuit recently filed against it.
- One resident suggested that, in addition to Glover, African-Americans in favor of the CAT activities and opposed to boorish, sometimes criminal behavior should consider taking a more public stand to counter charges of discrimination leveled by others. Failing to do so means the only ones addressing the race issue publicly are those making charges of racism.

Gary Gilbert, organizer of the meeting and founder of United Citizens for Better Neighborhoods (UCBN), said after the meeting that he agrees with the last idea. An African-American, Gilbert also believes that much of the friction in the community is the result of children's upbringing.

"In my viewpoint, African-Americans have become far too complacent in providing our children with the right morals, values and respect for authority that once defined the black community," Gilbert said by e-mail this week.

"As a culture, African-Americans have become mentally enslaved by the inhumane practices of the past and now feel far too comfortable 'playing the race card' as a means to avoid taking responsibility for their actions.

"This within itself is one of the reasons why black youth are out of control in this community. They have been taught by irresponsible parents that claiming racial discrimination during confrontations with authority is a effective tool to persuade and/or intimidate others from seeking justice in legal matters.

The civil rights advances that African-Americans have made in the last 50 years are being eroded by individuals who have no respect for the sacrifices made by our parents, grandparents and ancestors."

Glover said he was particularly interested in the stop-the-checks and best-practices suggestions, and that he would contact the group for a follow-up meeting in the coming weeks.