

# Crime fight endorsed for City Heights area

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*Author: Kathryn Balint*

City Heights -- an area where police say violence is decreasing slightly but which residents say remains a haven for illegal drug dealing and gang violence -- would be the focus of an intense anticrime effort under a pilot program endorsed by a City Council committee.

"The last six to nine months in our area has deteriorated so much that if you let it go any farther, the decent residents are going to move out," resident Carol Seneff told the council Rules Committee yesterday.

City Heights is a neighborhood in East San Diego generally bounded by Interstate 805, El Cajon Boulevard, and Home and Euclid avenues.

Seneff said police discovered four "drug houses" on her block of Wightman Street.

She said that if the crime problem in City Heights is allowed to persist, it will spread to surrounding neighborhoods.

"It's like a cancer," Seneff told the council. "You have to help us. We just can't deal with it anymore."

The committee voted 4-0 to endorse 3rd District Councilman John Hartley's plan to fight increasing crime, drugs and gang violence. The plan includes knocking down abandoned homes along 40th Street, where Interstate 15 is proposed to go through; bolstering support for the area's Neighborhood Watch program; and studying whether an after-school recreation program would reduce crime.

Taking a cue from Mayor O'Connor, Hartley, who is not a member of the committee, unilaterally proclaimed that City Heights is in a "state of emergency." Last year, at the behest of O'Connor, the council declared an emergency in the entire city because of out-of-control drug dealing and gang violence.

Hartley's request for a council declaration of an emergency in City Heights" failed to gain the support of committee members.

Those committee members voting to support the other aspects of his anti-crime effort were Bob Filner, Ron Roberts, Abbe Wolfsheimer and Linda Bernhardt. Councilman Wes Pratt and the mayor were absent.

The issue will go to the full council for further discussion.

Police said violent crimes in City Heights have decreased since last year, but Assistant

City Manager Jack McGrory acknowledged that a 10-block area there is still particularly violent.

Police said the crime rate in City Heights is double the city average. Four people were slain there in the first five months of this year.

Most of the violence stems from drug and gang activities, police said.

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