A plan to draw attention to City Heights' crime problem by posting billboards proclaiming the area the crime capital of San Diego was a success before even one sign went up.

The University Avenue Business Improvement Association got so much reaction -- albeit negative -- from police, politicians and people in the community that it agreed to a two-week delay.

If after that time the group does not receive a concrete plan from city officials to address the plague of drug dealing, violence and gang activity, the signs go up, members say.

The full message would read: "Welcome to City Heights, San Diego's crime capital. Won't anybody help us?"

The billboards were to have gone up Thursday along University Avenue from Interstate 805 to 49th Street. The idea, however, was heavily criticized by police, and it drew the ire of other City Heights residents and business owners, who said such a message was counterproductive and would do more harm than good.

What constitutes a concrete plan, meanwhile, remains undefined. One association member mentioned walking patrols on University Avenue.

"I don't know how we're going to come up with (a plan) and funding for it in two weeks," said Carol Seneff, a City Heights resident and a member of a local community crime task force. "We've been at it for three years."

In that time, several programs aimed at combatting crime have been started and are in effect. Seneff and others say the association has ignored those measures in its self-described desperate billboard tactic.

Jim Hill, a member of the association's board of directors, said he would seek to set up a meeting with Mayor Susan Golding and other city officials in the next week. The board decided Thursday to postpone its billboard campaign to allow the city, including Golding, to respond to its concerns.

"At this point, we don't want to alienate her, or anyone else," Hill said.

Added Dennis Pressfield, vice president of the association: "I think what's happening now is we're trying to get a focus. We've done that."
The city "can hear us now," Pressfield said.

Memo: Head varies

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