Group drops 'crime capital' sign plan
San Diego Union-Tribune - Saturday, June 19, 1993
Author: GREG MORAN

Billboards that would dub City Heights the "crime capital" of San Diego are not going up after all.

After two weeks of criticism and mounting pressure, the University Avenue Business Improvement Association backed off from its plan to plaster as many as 10 billboards along University Avenue with the message: "Welcome to City Heights, Crime Capital of San Diego. Won't Anybody Help Us?"

Members of the association said two weeks ago they would erect the signs unless they received a "concrete plan" from city leaders to fight crime in the area. The community experiences more drug dealing, prostitution, gang problems and violence than most other parts of the city.

While they did not get such a plan, directors of the association apparently received enough attention from the city to persuade them to drop the idea.

"I looked at (the billboards) as a desperate cry for help," said Jim Hill, a member of the board of directors. "I think that cry has been heard."

Heard, but over the protests of other residents and businesses in the area who said the signs would stigmatize the community, drive down property values and encourage criminals. Some were so upset they asked the City Council this week to consider cutting off the association's funding for next year.

Hill did not say whether the possibility of losing money played a role in the board's decision. Instead, he talked of a new community "action agenda" presented to city officials during a meeting to discuss the billboards as one of the triumphs of the controversy.

The agenda covers a variety of community issues, including crime prevention (more police officers, a police storefront or substation), social services and economic development.

Many are issues that other City Heights activists have lobbied for and worked on for years. The main outcome of the billboard controversy seems to have been uniting -- at least for a time -- the business association and other groups that in the past have been at loggerheads, said police Capt. Dan Berglund, who heads the department's Eastern Division.

The billboards were not the only anti-crime measure the association considered. On
Thursday, association members are scheduled to decide whether to hire a private security company to patrol University Avenue from Interstate 805 to 49th Street with armed guards. Merchants would pay a monthly fee for the service.

Memo: Head varies

Editions vary
Edition: 4,5
Section: LOCAL
Page: B-5:5 B-6:4
Index Terms: ADVERTISING ; BUSINESS ; CRIME ; CITY ; NEIGHBORHOODS ; SECURITY ; STREETS AND ROADS
Record Number: UTS1068348
Copyright 1993, 2007 Union-Tribune Publishing Co.

***Reproduced with permission granted by San Diego Union-Tribune***
Full-text obtained via NewsBank