

# \*\*\*Community Forum Notes\*\*\*

From Aug. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012

## Operation Face-Lift/SKID ROW

we are: a **grass-roots**, “**community**”-led effort

what we want: **clean**, **safe**, **healthy** streets

[www.operationfaceliftskidrow.webs.com](http://www.operationfaceliftskidrow.webs.com)

**Operation Face-Lift/Skid Row** on Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/OperationFaceLiftSkidRow>

Notes by: Katherine McNenny

September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012

Member/Skid Row Brigade

*(Not all the people who spoke up at this Forum were noted in this document. My apologies to the people whose names I missed and important information I may have omitted. It is my hope that this conversation will continue and that future Community Forums could be filmed. Please visit our Operation Face-Lift/Skid Row Facebook page to include your voice)*

Manuel Benito Compito, also known as “OG” and Chairman of the Skid Row Brigade, called this Community Forum to gather Skid Row residents- including the homeless, those that work in Skid Row as well as those from outside the Community to discuss the issue of street feeding and whether or not the City should create an Ordinance to control it. Also discussed was the recent position paper by the Downtown Clergy Council on this subject. Approximately 20-25 people showed up.

OG stated that he does not support a City Ordinance against street feeding. He also did not agree with many of the conclusions drawn from Clergy Council’s paper. Some areas of disagreement he touched on with the Council’s paper were as follows:

- The Missions are not open 24 hours a day, yet people come to Skid Row at all hours and homelessness persists around the clock.
- The hours the Missions feed often make it difficult for people to leave Skid Row to go look for housing and work elsewhere.
- There is a strong sense that people are not getting the help that they need in the Missions. The 12 step recovery process does not seem to be working for a vast majority of the population in Skid Row. Research is needed to determine the efficacy of the existing Skid Row recovery programs. Estimates by OG are that the relapse rate for the people in their programs is around 90%, with most people ending up back on drugs and alcohol. New and different recovery models are needed to better suit the Skid Row residents. The Skid Row Missions have not been receptive to helping out grass-roots efforts to clean-up the neighborhood. They have never assisted in helping purchase cleaning supplies or trash cans for the neighborhood, although many efforts have been made in the past to coordinate with them regarding these issues.
- Some Missions have a practice of ushering in their donors through their *front* doors on San Pedro Street, where care is taken to keep the sidewalks clean, then taking them out the *back* doors to

San Julian Street, where there is no organized effort to keep the street clean by any of the local service providers, thus setting up a false picture about the Community to those that do not live here.

Unrelated to any proposed City Ordinance, OG took this time to touch on other topics relating to the general health of the Skid Row Community. He spoke about Skid Row's continuing lack of an adequate number of trash cans and its severe deficiency in benches. There has been a long-standing frustration over the fact that people in the Community are often forced to scavenge for "crates" if they wish to sit down. Of high priority to OG, and many others who spoke, is putting people who *live* in the Community to *work* in the Community doing clean-ups. Many people who come to Skid Row need a job- and this seems like an obvious answer. This, OG went on to say, will bring dignity to the people who call Skid Row home. Clean-up is most needed on the weekends, when the City workers are off- OG says we need to rectify this with Community-based solutions with Community-led and paid workers. Other things that OG says are much needed in the Skid Row Community are universally accessible computer labs, nail salons and hair cutting services.

Kevin Haah, Lead Pastor of New City Church of Los Angeles and President of the Downtown Clergy Council attended this forum and spoke about his group's paper. His position is that feeding people on the streets discourages them from getting into facilities that can help them heal and recover. He feels that street feeding perpetuates chronic street sleeping and drug and alcohol addictions. He suggests passing out hygiene kits instead of food. Pastor Haah acknowledged that at one time he did engage in street feeding, and that there is a certain satisfaction to be gained by providing food to people clearly suffering, but has since changed his views to consider a more holistic approach to an individual's recovery. Pastor Haah does not support a City Ordinance against street feeding.

General Jeff, DLANC VP of Outreach and Communications and Resident Director for Central City East/Skid Row is opposed to a City Ordinance against street feeding. He suggested a marketing campaign to address the trash that results from the feedings. "FEED 'N CLEAN" is his suggestion for a tagline. General Jeff also read a prepared statement from Mai Lee, Director of Public Affairs for the Midnight Mission who was unable to attend the Forum. The Midnight Mission supports a City Ordinance against street feeding. The statement made reference to a continuing problem they have of street feeders blocking entrances to their building and not complying with the Mission's request to move.

None of the large Skid Row Missions had anyone present at the Forum. All were invited.

Mr. Umar Hakim with the "Create A Voice" organization which has as it's mission "...tapping the Muslim and Non-Muslim mind for personal development", spoke about the local Skid Row Mission's lack of concern for the Muslim and Jewish homeless population. Mr. Hakim expressed concern over the dominating Christian apostatizing that happens in the majority of downtown's large Missions and also mentioned the lack of appropriate food choices for Muslims and Jewish people. Only 1 Skid Row Mission is non-denominational and often full to capacity. Mr. Hakim spoke about partnering with Operation Face-Lift, being conscience of always bringing trash cans when his group comes to feed in Skid Row and the good that can come from connecting with grass-roots Community efforts. Umar also expressed dismay over the breaking up of families that happens in Skid Row and the fact that this creates dissention in the Community.

A gentleman named Clinton Carter spoke about the dysfunction of the large Skid Row Missions and how it was his opinion that they are not helping people and furthermore have no interest in partnering with local grass-roots efforts like Operation Face-Lift because it would eat into their donations. Mr. Carter has

worked at several local Missions, as well as Missions in other states. His conclusion is that the Skid Row Missions keep people in destructive cycles by keeping them in a drug-infested environment with too much temptation for those struggling with addiction. Clinton expressed horror over the fact that drug dealing was so widespread in the Community, even in and near the parks where he takes his children to play. Speaking of the Skid Row parks, he was concerned that there were not play areas for children or swing sets for the many kids of the local residents. Mr. Carter has a new business planned for Skid Row and intends to provide a safe and clean space for future feeders to set up.

Scott Ezzell, a resident from the Art's district attended the Community Forum and spoke about the feeding that occurs in his neighborhood. He feels that there is an ever increasing danger posed to the feeders and homeless due to the recent and rapid increase in residents and traffic. He relayed that there have been several near accidents around the street feedings, some serious. Scott supports a City Ordinance against street feeding.

Bobby Buck, a local Skid Row resident, spoke about the need for education for the outside feeders but is against any proposed City Ordinance.

A lady (name unknown) who is currently staying at the Union Rescue Mission mentioned that "her man" preferred to stay outside on the streets. She is opposed to any City Ordinance against street feedings because she appreciates the coffee and healthy and whole foods that are served in the mornings in Skid Row's streets. She said that the scripture says to "feed your flock, feed the sheep".

Becky Dennison of LACAN made clear her stance was against any proposed City Ordinance against street feeding in Skid Row. She mentioned "Food Not Bombs" as a sustainable and environmentally conscious organization that should be outreached to concerning the trash issue (Food Not Bombs currently feeds people in Skid Row). She explained that certain practices which this organization utilizes can and should be implemented by others in Skid Row, such as suggesting that feeders use compostable wrappings and serve healthy foods. Becky also echoed OG's concern that there are still not nearly enough trash cans in Skid Row and suggested growing food on local land and in planters. Dennison thanked Pastor Haah for attending the Community Forum, but noticed an unmistakable resemblance of word structure in the Clergy's position paper to previous writings from SLO Officer Deon Joseph of Skid Row. She suggested the Council would be better off soliciting the ideas and opinions from actual Skid Row residents in the future when forming opinions about the Community. In closing, she made a point that the people who live in the Community, whether they suffer addictions, mental illness or poverty, most definitely know what they need in terms of help or assistance. More care in listening to the people themselves is needed, in her opinion.

Also from LACAN, Pete White, General Dogon and Deborah Burton all spoke about opposing any City Ordinance against street feeding.

Steve Pham, who has been coming to Skid Row for the past 8 months to help clean the streets on weekends and has partnered with Operation Face-Lift, does not support a City Ordinance against street feeding, but rather recommends certain regulations be put in place regarding the food and safety. He maintains this position even though he has personal experience with the trash left behind from the feedings.

Pastor Cue, who has been "Street Preaching" at the corner of Winston & Wall Streets in a ministry he calls "the Row" for over 5 years and feeding too, spoke about not being supportive of any Proposed City Ordinance against street feeding.

Chris Skyes, who works in Skid Row, spoke about the tremendous amount of trash that he personally has a hand in helping to clean up in the neighborhood. He proposes outreach to the Churches to try to get them to feed indoors and wants to make known that his position is that the Churches that come to the Community to help, are instead often hurting Skid Row with the waste they leave behind. Chris is in favor of some form of regulation of the feedings.

Don Garza, local Historic Core resident and previous Skid Row resident, spoke about the rapidly transforming Historic Core area and the dynamics at play between the long-time Skid Row residents who live in SROs around and along Main St. and the newly arrived higher-income folks that are now living side by side these very low-income people. Don thinks there is a lack of understanding by the newer residents surrounding issues of food insecurity of their poorer neighbors. Many people he personally knows in the Historic Core SROs do not have enough food to eat, and many eat at the Missions. Don also explained that standing in line to eat at the local Missions would give anyone who wishes to know, a broader understanding of who eats there. He knows that many poor people from outside of downtown come eat meals at the Skid Row Missions because they lack money to feed their families adequately at home. Don is still undecided if he would support a City Ordinance against street feeding.

Tom Grode, a new downtown resident and frequent participant in Operation Face-Lift clean-ups, does not support a City Ordinance against street feeding, but would support some corrective measures be taken against the trash that accumulates from them. Tom spoke about the true meaning of compassion and how the simple act of being with someone suffering holds meaning for him. Tom feels that the structure of the Community Forum is very important for Skid Row and thinks it should continue as a regular event at least once a month. He suggested maintaining an email list from the event and keeping people informed and engaged in Skid Row issues. He also suggested that in regards to the street feedings, specific actions should be sought to address this issue, with the focus on solving the problem with targeted Community-driven ideas.

Katherine McNenny, a Skid Row resident, opposes a City Ordinance against street feeding in Skid Row, but mentioned that the local Missions who hold large street events could do a better job of cleaning up during and after their events. The trash that gets generated often blows down many streets and never gets picked up by these institutions.

Russell Brown, a local Historic Core resident, business owner an activist, concluded the evening with his suggestion that not everyone was going to agree with everything the Skid Row Community wanted, but to appreciate and value the people who agree with even just some of the Community's issues, and then work from there. He said that many people will engage on specific issues, but not necessary others and that he thought that was something that could be built upon. Mr. Brown also offered the use of his space at the Exchange for future Community Forums.

A big THANK YOU to Russell Brown for providing the space to have this Community Forum at.

**FACT:** Skid Row currently has NO "Community space" available to it's residents that allow children.

Ballots were passed out last night at the forum to all that wished to fill them out. Results below.

## OPERATION FACE LIFT/ SKID ROW 2012 BALLOT

- RESIDENT (9)
- HOMELESS
- WORK IN SKID ROW (8)
- OWN BUSINESS IN SKID ROW (2)
- (CHURCH VOLUNTEER) (1)

YES...I BELIEVE THERE SHOULD BE A CITY ORDINANCE "AGAINST" FEEDING. (4)

NO...THERE SHOULD NOT BE AN CITY ORDINANCE "AGAINST" FEEDING (11)

(NOT SURE) (1)

Below is an example of what could be a flier, a sticker, a poster or even spoken verbally to remind street feeders who come to Skid Row to clean-up after they feed. Here is the tag line, feel free to make you own art too!



**FEED 'N CLEAN**  
**Skid Row, DTLA**

## Pictures of the Forum by Bobby Buck/Skid Row resident



OG Man



the Forum



Pastor Haah outside the Exchange speaking to Skid Row Community members