

San Joaquin County Grand Jury



CITY OF STOCKTON

South Stockton Quality of Life

As the South Side Goes, So Goes Stockton

2014-2015 Case No. 1414

Summary



South Stockton is generally south of the Crosstown freeway (Hwy. 4), but excluding Weston Ranch.

South Stockton, comprising an area generally south of the Crosstown freeway but excluding Weston Ranch, has an estimated population approaching 100,000 residents. The Grand Jury initiated an investigation of that area prompted by a guided tour and the review of a series of newspaper articles highlighting the issues and the effects of long term neglect of the area. South Stockton suffers from extensive blight, poverty, deteriorating housing, slumlord residential ownership, and vacant lots, a lack of neighborhood services, and widespread drug dealing and crime. Among the findings of the Grand Jury are:

- South Stockton, for many years, has been neglected and underserved by the City

- People outside and inside South Stockton perceive the area being an unsafe place to do business, shop or live
- Code enforcement is inadequately staffed to deal with the problems of South Stockton, enforcement is reactive rather than proactive

Among the recommendations of the Grand Jury are:

- City resources should be equitably distributed based on the needs of each City Council district
- The City, in its present and future budgets, should provide the necessary resources to increase the staff of both Code Enforcement and Stockton Police Department (SPD) necessary to adequately address the longstanding neglect affecting South Stockton

Glossary

Blitz program	A targeted, geographically-limited effort of social, blight, and anti-crime programs
CEO	Code Enforcement Office
City	City of Stockton
City Attorney	The appointed attorney representing the City Council and the City
City Council	Unless specified, includes the six elected council members and the mayor
City Manager	Chief executive officer hired by the City Council to administer day-to-day City operations
Marshall Plan	A comprehensive, citywide effort involving both public agencies and private groups to reduce crime and increase public safety
Operation Ceasefire	A problem-oriented police initiative specifically aimed at youth gun violence
Slumlords	Landlords who attempt to maximize profits by minimizing spending on maintenance of rented property, typically in deteriorating neighborhoods
South Stockton	An urban area generally south of the Crosstown freeway between Interstate 5 and Highway 99
SPD	Stockton Police Department
STAND	Stocktonians Taking Action to Neutralize Drugs

Background

The 2014-2015 Grand Jury is aware of the overall responsibility of the City to oversee and implement programs and policies to protect, enhance, and rehabilitate the entire City.

Prior to commencing this investigation, the Grand Jury reviewed media reports related to South Stockton and participated in a guided tour of the area.

Jurors decided to limit their investigation to the quality of life in South Stockton, because the area is about one-third of the City's population, to determine the extent to which the City is adequately addressing issues in that part of the City. The Grand Jury elected to focus its investigation on Code Enforcement housing issues, the availability of neighborhood retail services, as well as the impact of drugs and crime on South Stockton and its residents.

Reason for Investigation

The Grand Jury concluded that highlighting long-standing issues of neglect in the south part of the City would help start the process of correcting them, and make South Stockton a more viable and vibrant part of the City.

Method of Investigation

Materials Reviewed

- Riverside Livability Program documents
- Documents describing the activities of STAND
- A series of articles appearing in The Record describing quality-of-life issues in South Stockton
- Selective City ordinances
- Photos of graffiti on City-owned property in South Stockton
- Statistical code enforcement data from the City
- Census Bureau demographic information
- California Department of Finance and the California Employment Development Department data

Interviews Conducted

- Members of the City Council
- Member of the office of the City Attorney
- The City Manager
- Representative of STAND
- Reporter responsible for the newspaper articles
- Representative of the CEO

Some South Stockton Sites Visited/Observed

- Gospel Center Rescue Mission
- A home recently renovated by STAND
- Stockton Shelter for the Homeless
- Van Buskirk Park Golf Course
- Sierra Vista Homes Development
- Dilapidated houses
- St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services

Facts, Findings, and Recommendations

1.0 Population, Demographics, and Economics

South Stockton has an estimated population of 100,000, a number that represents about one-third of the City's population. The population of the area includes a larger percentage of African Americans and Hispanics than other parts of the City.

South Stockton has a significantly higher percentage of residents living below the poverty level than the rest of the City and the State of California. In the 95202 ZIP code, for example, more than 45 percent of the population lived below the poverty line. In 2012, the most current Census Bureau data available, residents of City Council Districts 5 and 6, covering South Stockton, had the lowest per capita incomes in the City, \$13,785 and \$14,656 respectively. By comparison, the per capita income in District 1, covering the northernmost part of the City, was \$25,530.

Unemployment in the 95202 ZIP code was more than 30 percent in 2011, compared to a statewide average that year of roughly 12 percent and an annual rate of 16.8 percent for San Joaquin County. More than 30 percent of South Stockton residents over the age of 25 lack a high school diploma.

Findings

F1.1 While there are pockets of poverty throughout Stockton, much of it is concentrated in South Stockton where incomes and educational attainment are low.

F1.2 Compared to the rest of the City, South Stockton has few major retail outlets, including major grocery outlets, and only in recent months did a financial institution announce plans to locate a branch in South Stockton.

F1.3 People outside and inside South Stockton perceive the area as being an unsafe place to do business, shop, or live.

2.0 Housing and Code Enforcement

About 30 percent of South Stockton residents are homeowners, roughly half the rate for the City as a whole, according to Census Bureau data. Citywide, homeownership is highest among whites, roughly 68 percent, and lowest among African Americans and Hispanics, about 42 percent. More than 60 percent of the South Stockton housing units are rentals.

The Code Enforcement Office (CEO) is responsible for enforcing the City's building codes and abating blight and graffiti. There are fewer than 10 CEO staff members to cover the City. Due to the low number of CEO staff, Code Enforcement staff is limited to responding to complaints and are not able to proactively initiate their independent investigations. There are no plans by the City Manager to add code enforcement staff during the next two budget years. CEO efforts are largely reactive, meaning enforcement officers respond to complaints rather than proactively addressing problems.

There are efforts to abate blight by several groups, including STAND, a non-profit organization, working with the SPD and CEO to eradicate blight, slumlords, and to reduce crime and drugs, buying homes, and rehabilitating them for occupancy by low income families.

Findings

F2.1 South Stockton has some of the lowest levels of homeownership in the City. This creates a more transient population and one with less "buy-in" to the community.

F2.2 Code enforcement is inadequately staffed to deal with the problems of South Stockton. Enforcement and abatement efforts are reactive rather than proactive.

F2.3 In many cases, South Stockton residents do not report blight, graffiti, and building code violations because they do not believe the City will help, and/or they fear reprisals from their landlord.

F2.4 The City is not aggressively taking proactive steps to remove slumlords from South Stockton.

F2.5 STAND is making contributions to address housing, drug activity, crime, and quality-of-life issues in South Stockton.

Recommendation

R2.1 By December 31, 2015, the City resources be allocated on an equitable distribution based on the needs of each City Council district, and the City in its present and future budgets provide the necessary resources to increase the CEO and SPD staff necessary to adequately address the longstanding neglect affecting South Stockton.

3.0 Crime

No area of Stockton is without crime problems. In 2012, based on data provided by the City and media reports, the City had a violent crime rate of 782.8 per 100,000 residents, compared to a statewide rate of 332.6 and a nationwide rate of 223.2. Including property crimes, Stockton's overall crime rate is the

highest in the county. Compared to Riverside, a city with a similar population and density, Stockton had a violent crime rate that was more than double. Stockton homicides peaked at 71 in 2012, giving the City a homicide rate of 23.7 per 100,000 residents compared to a national rate of about five. The SPD oversees anti-crime efforts throughout the City. After the City's economic collapse in 2008, SPD lost more than 100 experienced officers. The trend seems to have abated somewhat, however, layoffs, resignations, and retirements, as well as the difficulties of finding qualified personnel, have reduced the police force significantly in recent years. The SPD is rebuilding, but it will take time. Street gangs are among the major problems faced by the SPD. At least 45 gangs are known to be active in Stockton. Although gang activity can be found citywide, much of it is concentrated in South Stockton.

Efforts are being made to address crime with programs such as the Marshall Plan, Operation Ceasefire, and the Blitz program. The Blitz program strategically utilizes City resources within secured neighborhoods for a 90-day period, using code enforcement, SPD, and other City departments aimed to reclaim neighborhoods by addressing blight, crime, and drug activity. However, no area of South Stockton presently has been designated as part of the Blitz program. STAND is working in cooperation with SPD to implement community policing, which is becoming the standard for the City. Community policing involves assigning officers to specific neighborhoods for extended periods.

Findings

F3.1 The activity of street gangs stems from and exacerbates poverty problems for South Stockton residents.

F3.2 Crimes of violence, in recent years soared citywide as policing levels plummeted.

F3.3 In recent months the City has begun to address the problems of crime, but it will take months, possibly years, of effort to rebuild the police force decimated by the City's bankruptcy.

Recommendations

R3.1 By December 31, 2015, the City Council shall begin quarterly public reporting of its results from the Operation Ceasefire and Marshall Plan programs, with emphasis on criminal activities that originate or concentrate in South Stockton.

R3.2 By December 31, 2015, the City, working with community organizations, make sure South Stockton quality-of-life programs are given consideration for funding and manpower.

R3.3 By September 30, 2015, while continuing with its newly established Blitz program, the City concentrate efforts on established – and transparent – criteria, and give consideration to the needs of South Stockton.

4.0 City Funding

City resources to address issues such as blight and urban decay, according to witness testimony, are allocated throughout the City without a determination of need. A number of City officials and private

groups expressed concern about this system. There seems to be interest in a more needs-based approach to budgeting.

Findings

F4.1 South Stockton has been neglected and underserved by City government for many years.

F4.2 City officials, with some notable exceptions, continue to speak about the problems of South Stockton, but take little action.

Recommendations

R4.1 By September 30, 2015, the City should begin holding a series of public workshop/forums devoted to the needs of South Stockton – as guided by its residents – with the purpose of developing short- and long-term goals to correct the long neglected issues affecting South Stockton.

Conclusion

The investigation by the Grand Jury demonstrates that South Stockton, an area of greater poverty and crime than most other areas of Stockton, has not been served well by City Hall in any sustained and meaningful way. City government cannot do it all. It will take herculean efforts by South Stockton civic, social, and religious leaders too, but City government should take the lead. Only the City has the resources, police power and platform for public communication to effect change. South Stockton deserves its share of the City assets. In fact, given years of neglect in this part of the City, where about one-third of Stocktonians live, needs more than its share of City resources until the area awakens to become a vibrant and vital part of the City that all citizens want and South Stockton residents deserve.

Disclaimers

Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing such evidence except upon the specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Penal Code Sections 911, 924.1 (a) and 929). Similarly, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Penal Code Sections 924.2 and 929).

Response Requirements

California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to all findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court within 90 days of receipt of the report.

The Stockton City Council shall respond to each of the findings and recommendations.

Mail or hand deliver a hard copy of the response to:

Honorable Lesley D Holland, Presiding Judge
San Joaquin County Superior Court
P.O. Box 201022
Stockton, CA 95201

Also please email the response to Ms. Trisa Martinez, Staff Secretary to the Grand Jury at grandjury@sjcourts.org