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Residents seek solutions in Iron Triangle

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Residents from Richmond's crime-plagued Iron Triangle neighborhood gathered in a church gymnasium Thursday night to demand more youth programs, better street lights and increased police patrols.

The Rev. Ramiro Flores, the pastor at St. Mark's Church, where the meeting took place, praised the residents for summoning the courage to insist on better conditions in their neighborhood.

"People have become so used to these conditions they don't demand anymore their rights," Flores told the crowd of about 200 who were waving colorful flags that read "mas luces," and "programas juvenes," Spanish for "more lights," and "youth programs."

"But tonight, we won't beg for change. Tonight, we will demand it."

Mayor Gayle McLaughlin said she supported Iron Triangle residents 100 percent as they struggle to reclaim their streets from the degradations of violence, blight and poverty.

"You have the right to a neighborhood with streets that are intact, clean, well-lit and safe," she said. "Your children have a right to centers of recreation, culture, training and learning."

The Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization called the meeting to bring together the community and city officials. Councilwoman Ludmyrna Lopez, City Manager Bill Lindsay, fire Chief Michael Banks and deputy chief Ed Medina listened closely to the residents and responded to questions.

Armed with statistics that show a disproportionately high amount of violent crime in the Iron Triangle, residents asked city officials to redeploy police patrols from less-troubled neighborhoods.

"The current policy of assigning police officers not by the number of violent incidents leaves communities like the Iron Triangle dramatically underserved," a CCISCO brochure reads. "Although 42 percent of the violent crime occurs in this neighborhood, it receives the same police service as any other community."

Medina said the police department is committed to providing effective police service in the Iron Triangle. The department recently swore in six new cadets, which will help ease officer overtime and understaffing citywide, he

said.

"I want you to know that we have a dedicated group of officers who are working in the Iron Triangle," Medina said. "And I want you to know that I will do everything in my power to make things better."

Poor street lighting, blight and illegal dumping fosters a lawless atmosphere, residents said. Hector Jauregui has lived in the Iron Triangle for 18 years and said street lighting always has been bad.

"I am a working man who gets up at 4 a.m. to go to work, and it's a problem," Jauregui told city officials. "Tonight, when you are home, I ask you to turn the lights out, put your hand on your heart in the darkness and think of us."

There is a critical need in the Iron Triangle and throughout Richmond for youth programs, organizers said. They cited a citywide youth survey that showed a large percentage of young people would like to see more recreation, education and art programs.

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