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Gross Gaslamp Shocks Comic-Con Attendees

Downtown used to be a source of pride, not shame



These encampments are along C Street and Tenth Avenue in downtown San Diego. U-T

By Damon Zwicker

Profound disappointment and outrage are the only words I can think of to describe the deplorable conditions in the Gaslamp Quarter, particularly around Fourth Avenue and E Street.

As a visitor to San Diego as an employee of an event company tasked with installing experiential marketing events for Comic-Con San Diego, I was shocked, astonished and horrified by what I witnessed during my recent visit.

The streets are plagued by individuals evidently intoxicated, littered with glass pipes and needles. Sidewalks are covered in feces and urine, trash is strewn everywhere, and

orange-vested city workers are reduced to pressure washing the streets and mopping the sidewalks in a futile attempt to maintain some semblance of cleanliness.

Adding to the horror, zombie-like people wander the streets in a drug-filled haze or stand doubled over at the waist, “nodding” for extended periods, completely oblivious to their surroundings. Is this the image of a world-class city?

These dangerous and unsanitary conditions are a disgrace, posing serious risks to both residents and tourists. The lack of effective, systemic problem-solving to address these issues is a glaring failure of leadership and governance. The city’s reputation is tarnished by the evident inability to manage and mitigate the rampant drug use and associated squalor that has taken over what should be a vibrant and welcoming area. To any and all visitors, I strongly advise staying away from the San Diego Gaslamp District for your own safety.

Mayor Todd Gloria and the people of San Diego should be ashamed of allowing such conditions to persist. It is clear that there is severe neglect in addressing the root causes of these problems and implementing sustainable solutions. The sight of people with substance use disorders openly using drugs and the pervasive filth on the streets speaks volumes about the city’s priorities and the effectiveness of its public health and safety strategies. These issues are not only a blight on the city’s image but also a significant public health crisis that demands immediate and robust intervention.

Police officers in patrol cars and on foot were either unable or unwilling to intervene in the open drug use happening along Fourth Avenue and continuing down E Street. The complete lack of response from law enforcement not only endangers the lives of those directly affected by the drug trade but also puts law-abiding citizens at significant risk. This neglect erodes the community’s trust in the Police Department’s ability to maintain public safety. It’s disheartening to think that those who are tasked with ensuring the safety and well-being of the area’s residents and visitors have become so desensitized to these conditions that they no longer recognize them as abnormal or urgent.

Adding to my dismay, when I asked a security guard doorman, “What’s up with all the open drug use and filth on the streets?” he responded with a resigned, “Welcome to San Diego! This is how it is now.”

This response underscores a disturbing acceptance of these dire conditions, reflecting a community and city leadership that have either become desensitized to the decay and danger surrounding them or simply do not care. The fact that such conditions are met with resignation rather than urgency speaks volumes about the systemic neglect and apathy that has allowed this situation to deteriorate to its current state.

I will actively discourage anyone I know from visiting this city until there is a significant and tangible improvement in these conditions. San Diego deserves better. Its residents and visitors deserve to walk through the streets without fear or disgust.

It's time for the city's leadership to take real, meaningful action to restore the Gaslamp Quarter to a place of pride, not a source of shame. This means investing in comprehensive drug rehabilitation programs, increasing the presence and effectiveness of law enforcement, and ensuring that public spaces are kept clean and safe for everyone. Only through dedicated and sustained efforts can San Diego hope to reclaim its reputation and ensure a better quality of life for all its inhabitants and visitors.

Zwicker is a project manager and lives in the San Fernando Valley.

Link: <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/2024/08/05/opinion-i-came-to-work-at-comic-con-and-left-reeling-from-the-gaslamps-dark-side/>