

City targets prostitution with letter writing campaign

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OAKLAND (KGO) -- Sometimes to make a point, you need a show of force. And that's what happened in a neighborhood just south of Lake Merritt in Oakland Friday afternoon.

At the corner of 17th and International Boulevard, a group of locals and city officials gathered to mark the closure of two problem hotels. With help from Oakland City Hall, a neighborhood that has seen more than enough prostitution in the past two decades seems to be gaining ground.

Nowadays, the only resident at the National Lodge on International Boulevard is a not-so-friendly guard dog with a bark and apparent willingness to bite. That's a major improvement in the opinion of the people who live and work there, "With the closure of the hotel, it's gonna to lower the prostitution in our area and hopefully we won't see them as much," said mother Millie Bolanos.

For two decades, the name International Boulevard has become synonymous with prostitution. And for two decades, police, politicians, and neighborhood activists like Andy Nelson have fought it, "Right now I am most concerned about the rights of people who live in this neighborhood; to walk their children to school in a safe friendly family environment where you don't have to walk past a 50-year-old man picking up a 15-year-old girl."

Now they're about to use a new weapon. When locals see someone they suspect is propositioning a prostitute, they're to write down the license plate of his car, send the information to the city, and the police will write a letter to the car's registered owner.

"We're not making any accusations," Nelson said. "The letter simply says that it was reported that the vehicle was in an area that's known for prostitution. And to let the vehicle's owner know it's not safe to do this, it's not acceptable, so they should be careful."

Bolanos added, "They're going to have to be surprised and they're going to have to deal with the letter."

"We need to make the guys who are coming here to do this know that it is not okay," Nelson said. "You can't come here and treat women like that, you can't treat our neighborhood like that, it is not acceptable, and we will tell on you."

The program begins October 1.