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San Francisco, CA  
March 10, 2024

#3

(via email)

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Re: Drugs Enforcement & Data (2)

Dear Commissioners:

This letter supplements my previous one of March 7, 2024. The purpose of that letter was two fold: (1) to dispute the notion that overdose deaths are the sole proper metric to judge the progress in the multi-month effort to curtail drug dealing and usage in the downtown markets, and (2) to suggest that the focus at Police Commission meetings on the dealer:user arrest ratio tells us little without an understanding of the broader context, i.e. the City's strategy and how the relevant agencies are working collectively to further the goal of closing the markets. This letter elaborates on the first point, the metrics.

Chief Scott's presentation to this Commission on June 14, 2023 at the inception of the effort is a good place to start.<sup>1</sup> There, setting aside the nomenclature used, he identified a number of objectives and measures including arrests, bookings, referrals, number of folks accepting services, (yes) reducing overdose deaths, and in general reducing sales and usage. He also explicitly stated that the number of arrests "was not a measure of effectiveness" and that, from SFPD's standpoint, most important is that "we need to see a difference on the streets." As a user quoted by the Chief said, "it's easy and cheap" to buy drugs on the streets downtown. Hence, the downtown scene; no mystery there.

Of course, overdose deaths *are* a useful metric, but as I noted in my March 7 letter it is dangerously misguided to declare that metric, alone, the one that proves the current

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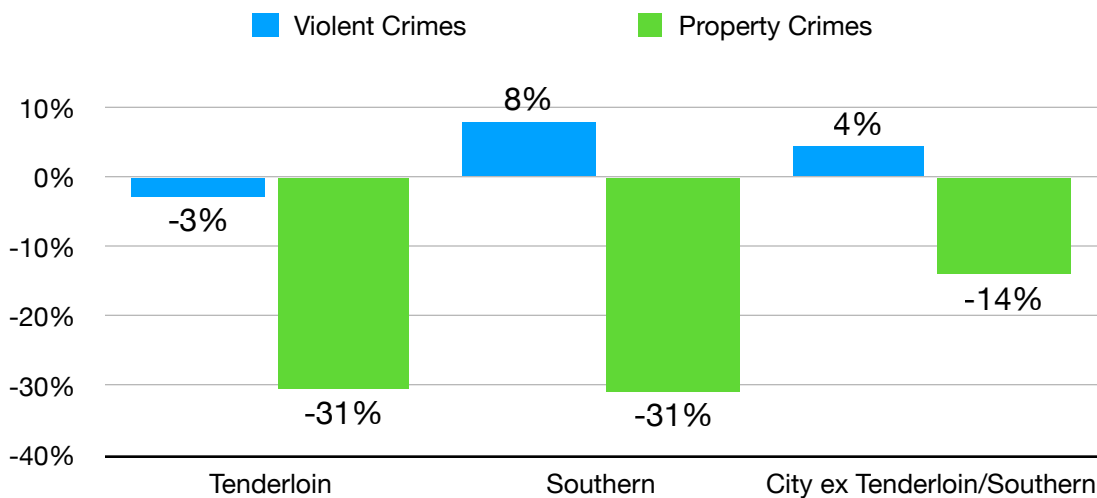
<sup>1</sup> [https://www.sf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/PoliceCommission61423-Police Commission Presentation Open Air Drug Market Collaboration 06132023.pdf](https://www.sf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/PoliceCommission61423-Police%20Commission%20Presentation%20Open%20Air%20Drug%20Market%20Collaboration%2006132023.pdf)

effort a failure.<sup>2</sup> As Professor Thomas Kerr in the Department of Medicine at the University of British Columbia said just last week — British Columbia and Vancouver in particular being the North American epicenter of “harm reduction” —

People ask why, with decriminalization, the overdose rate keeps going up. And the answer is very simple and straightforward. It’s because the drug supply has become increasingly toxic.<sup>3</sup>

Does this mean we should ignore the number of overdose deaths? Of course not. But it does mean that we need many metrics to properly measure progress. As intuition suggests and as Chief Scott has frequently opined, the abandonment of law enforcement at the downtown markets would likely cause *more* overdose deaths. Provable? No. Likely? Yes.

I cannot say if one of Chief Scott’s oft-quoted and apparently favored metric — “we need to see a difference on the streets” — has come to pass. But let us consider some statistics.<sup>4</sup> The enforcement effort began sometime in the month of June 2023 coextensive with the Chief’s presentation to the Commission. At that meeting, he said the integrated command would begin a few days after that June 14 meeting, concentrating efforts in the Tenderloin and adjacent SOMA. Immediately below is a chart that compares property crimes and violent crimes between (a) the Tenderloin station and Southern Station on the one hand, and (b) the City ex those stations on the other hand for the period July 1-December 31, 2023. Both stations performed significantly *better* than the City except Southern Station for violent crimes.

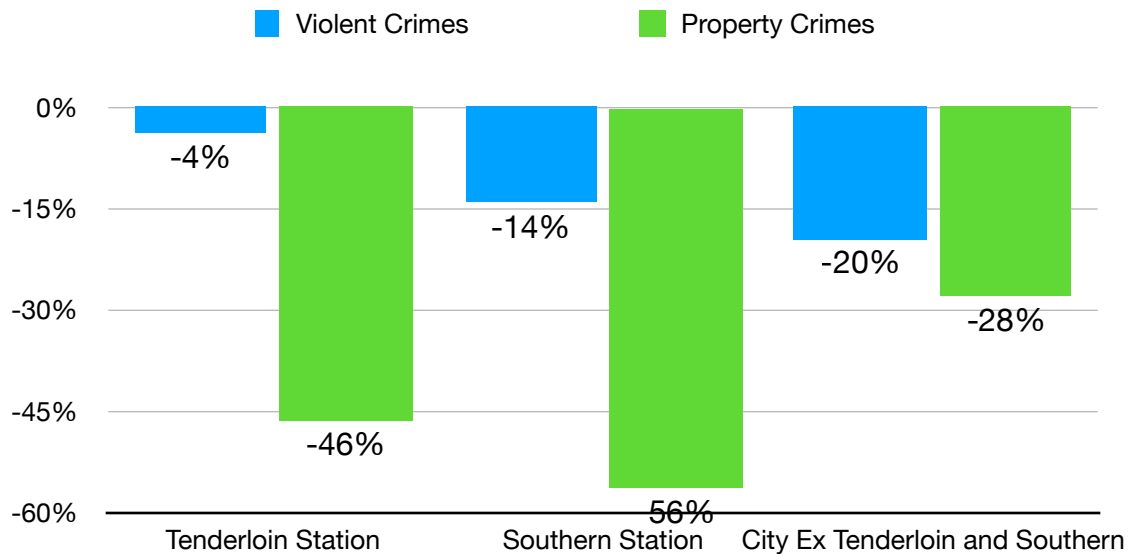


<sup>2</sup> Overdose deaths are not falling.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/07/legal-challenge-pure-drugs-overdose-british-columbia-canada>

<sup>4</sup> All data from sorts on SFPD Crime Dashboard. <https://www.sanfranciscopolice.org/stay-safe/crime-data/crime-dashboard>

Next is a chart for the period January 2-March 3, 2024. (The SFPD Crime Dashboard does not permit data analysis over multiple years, hence these two charts for two different years.) Both stations perform better than the City on *property* crimes but worse than the City on violent crimes.



Because the number of City wide violent crimes is a small fraction of property crimes (771 in the most recent two months compared to 5500 property crimes) we can be fairly certain that given the robust data set over both time periods the two District stations performed considerably better than the City as a whole on property crimes. On the other hand, Tenderloin station alone performed better than the City on violent crimes using 2023 data but not as well this year. Is it possible that the increase in the number of drug dealer/user arrests, the greater and more ubiquitous police presence, and (apparently) easier access to social services has modestly changed social and behavioral norms for the better in the Tenderloin and nearby SOMA?

Returning to where I began, overdose deaths, it seems prudent to include reported crimes to any fair consideration of the efficacy of the enforcement efforts since June 2023. These data alone may not be probative of “success” or “failure” but, as with overdose deaths, surely relevant.

If the real measure of success is, paraphrasing Chief Scott, the conditions on the streets, I suppose we await a useful measure of that beyond what the eye sees.

Sincerely,  
Paul Allen